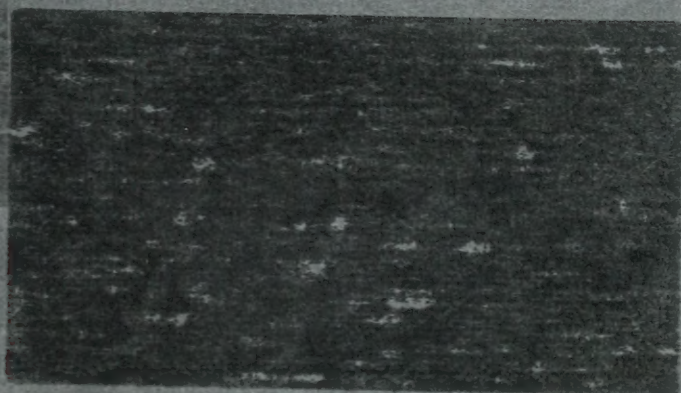


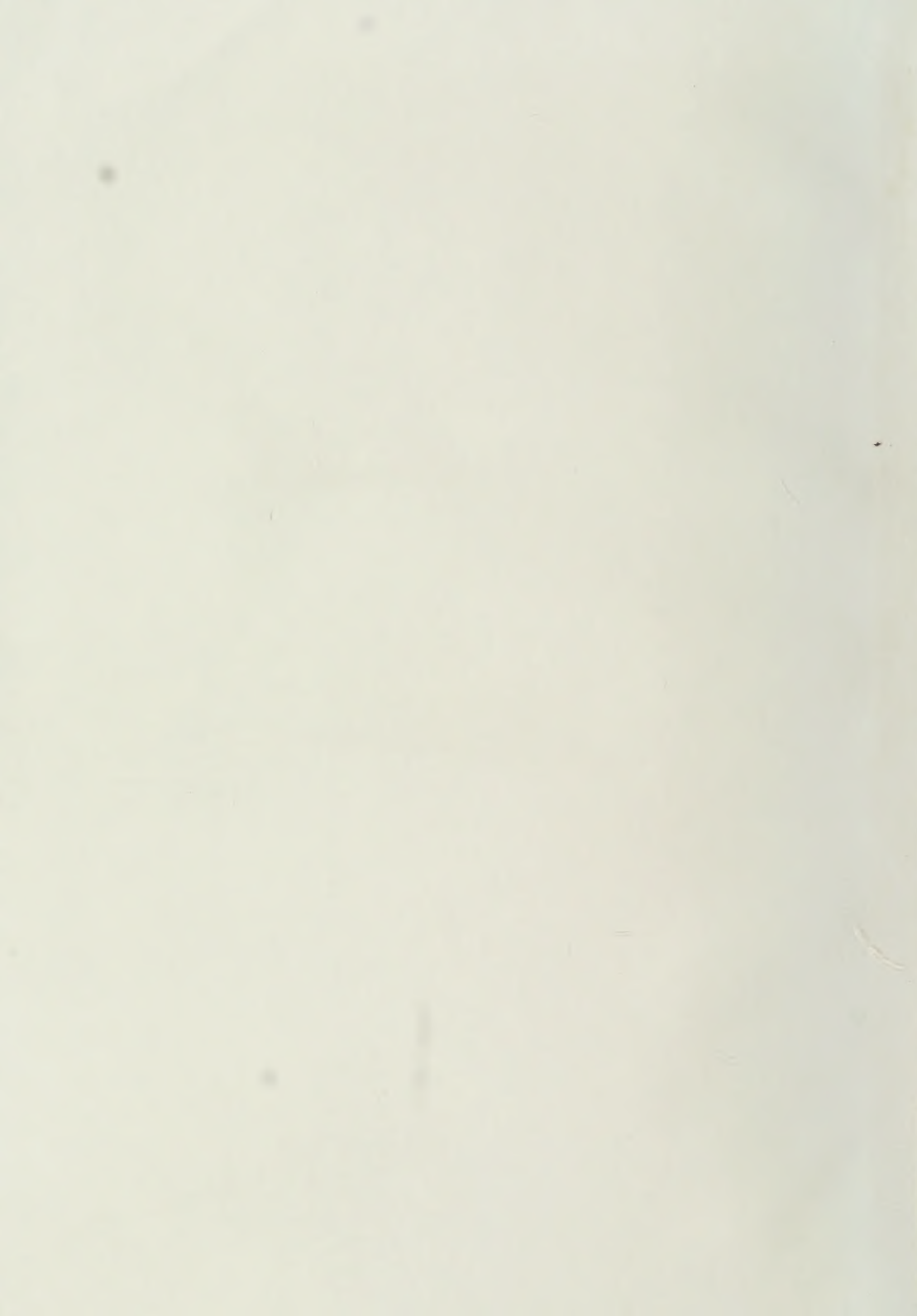
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THEERS



by

Yvonne Jack

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"CHEERS"

by Yvonne Jack

Chapter 1

"Stephen on those days when there was rain, and I was working with my papa in his fields, to me the sun would come out and take away the darkness from over our village," papa's voice now comes back to me. Today after much rain, the village is still dark, but to me, over the little house which papa had built for us with his very own hands, there seems to be no darkness. No, there will never be any darkness.

Once I had said that I will leave my past behind me, by walking over hills and through villages for the rest of my days. That is what I am doing now, I mean walking out of my village, but I am not sure about just how far I will reach, because so many things have come about since I made that vow to myself, yes, so many things.

Now as I continue on my walk, I am beginning to think about what started it all Was it that time when I ran away from the school house for the third time and never went back? Or maybe it was that time when there was the drought and all our cattle had died because the wells, rivers and streams had dried up. Then to add to it all, our barn was burnt down. That day I went to the hill I claimed mine and sat down. And there before me as I looked down. I saw men working, toiling under the broiling sun. To me it appeared that my papa and the other men were wasting their labour. Then I began to imagine that we were leaving our village, yes, everybody was, but then I discarded the thought because I knew that my papa and the other men were never going to leave what their forefathers had prepared for them. But then, soon the rains came and the wells, rivers and streams were filled once again and everybody was happy. There was merriment and even me too, was happy.

Then in the middle of the feast which was being offered because the good Lord had showered the village with rain once again, my papa took me in his arms and said: "Stephen the time is near when I must kiss this land goodbye, then it will be all yours, so come to the fields and help me to till the soil, so that you will get the feel of holding your very own soil through your fingers." There was an applause from the gathering and I was too choked to say anything. The words were so very beautiful but yet I knew that I was not going to carry out my papa's wishes because I did not like toiling under the broiling sun, nor did I like my papa doing it either and I promised myself, that I would

put an end to it someday. My dreams were that I would take my mama and papa away with me to the city where papa and I would work together in a factory so that we would be able to buy mama all the pretty things a woman living in the city would like to own. Often I shared these dreams with mama but she would only shoo me away and warn me that I must never let my papa know about the evil things that go around in my mind.

Poor mama never knew that I thought about and wanted those things for her, because she always appeared so sad and maybe that was because like me, she was not happy being just a peasant. She never participated in any of the activities that went on in the neighbours' yards, instead she would go and sit by the window and read away from her large bible. I can remember, but only with sadness, just how I used to slip away from our house and go around to the shed in the back and there I would find papa pounding away at the black pepper or coffee or whatever was in the large wooden mortar. Then, when I had properly taken my seat at his side, he would inquire after mama. "She is reading her bible at the window as usual," I would say miserably. Then after rubbing my head for some time he would in turn say, "do not let that have you miserable Stephen, because she is praying for all of us. Maybe she is praying that we should have a better harvest next year, or maybe that one day we should become close to each other as a family really should be. Leave her alone son and let her pray." Then with tears brimming his eyes and with a hurt voice he would say hurriedly, "Leave her alone son, she is not a happy woman but she loves us in her own way."

"I know that it hurts you when we do not go and join the neighbours in their yards, and I know something else too, it hurts you because of me, doesn't it?"

"You think that I miss the card game and the drinking session with the other men, Well you are wrong son, although I did very much at a time but now I realise that I love you and your mama too much to let a little card game worry me."

With that he would grin and rumple my hair a little more. I do not know just why he would always do that, I mean the part about rumpling my hair, but it always made me feel better. Oh papa! But that was not the beginning of my troubles because when the rain had come again it helped to bring back our village to the way it used to be.

Now here it comes back to me, it is somewhat hazy and confusing at first but now I am beginning to put the pieces of the puzzle together. It all began on one of those days when my history teacher Miss Pete chose to give us our history test. The day just hadn't started out right. Papa had chosen to lecture me about the uselessness of my future, if I were not going to work in the fields, just as I was about to give my notes a looking over. Now there was Miss Pete with Shakespeare! Firstly she began reading about him. It was not the first time that she did so when giving us a history test, nor was this the first test that we were about to receive concerning him. I began to imagine myself being him, how famous he must have been! how rich! He did not have to plough the fields to survive. I was going to be an author, anything at all to get away from ploughing the fields. My dreams were made, they were real! "Stephen!" I heard my name being shouted. I looked up sharply into the glaring eyes of my history teacher. I did not know just what she was saying amidst the laughing voices of my fellow students because I got up and ran out of the school house. I had to get to my hill because no one would be able to hurt me there, or so I had thought. It was all too confusing to me. As I ran I looked back and saw Miss Pete standing there with pity in her eyes.

Then that very afternoon she came upon 'my' hill and found me huddled behind some bushes looking down at the men who were in the fields with their shirts in their hands, wiping away at the sweat on their back, neck and arms. I remember now, just how my papa would wring out the sweat from his shirt back into the soil. At first when he had just started, the other men would laugh at him, but soon they began to marvel at his act each afternoon after working in the fields. Suddenly, as soon as the sun was down and the men had gathered up their tools, papa would take off his shirt and wipe away at the sweat on his body. Then the other men would perform the same act of wringing out the sweat from their shirts back into the soil as though it was some solemn ritual. Some would use handkerchiefs according to the amount of steam they had let off, but all the time my papa would use his shirt as he was a 'real' big man.

Yes, there was Miss Pete looking down at the peasants with scornful yet amused eyes. She must have felt my eyes upon her, because she moved her eyes abruptly away from the peasants and turned them

upon me. Suddenly she sat down on a rock opposite me and said. "Stephen I am sorry if I did humiliate you today, now I know that pretty soon I will be out of apologies so now I have decided to let you know the truth about yourself. Now that the time is here I do not know if I am quite capable of letting you know the truth which I am sure will be very painful. But then, there is no use in putting it off is there?" With that Miss Pete burst into uncomfortable tears and I began to get an uneasy feeling so I begged her to stop crying and to get on with it.

Then between her tears she revealed to me that I am a lunatic because I was different from the other kids of my age. I stared dumbly at her and made a feeble attempt to smile at the explanation which she had given to me. But then there was this big lump in my throat and the queasy sensation I was beginning to get at the pit of my stomach, that prevented me from doing so.

Yes, I stared dumbly at her, but why was I feeling this frightened and bewildered because of such a stupid revelation which came from my teacher a woman whom I was certain did not like or care anything about me. Maybe the reason to all my confusing feelings was due to the shock of it all, as I thought that maybe she was letting me know that I was being expelled from the school for running out the way I did.

"Stephen I know that all of this is hard for you to accept but when the newness of it dies off it would not hurt a bit. At least you will have to get used to it because then there would be no use dodging it any more. Soon everybody will know and it will hurt even more if you are not fully prepared. Your kind of life is a hard difficult and even humiliating one Stephen, which I am sure the strongest person will dodge. But as we both know, you have got to start accepting it quickly."

With that she got up and brushed the dirt from off her skirt. "One more thing Stephen, your mama asked me to take the responsibility of letting you know the truth about yourself." What was she saying, mama? how could my mama be mixed up in this cruel and senseless thing?

I watched Miss Pete as she carefully made her way through the track and over the boulders which helped to make the track narrow

with the bushes that was closing it in on either side. After she had disappeared from my sight, I felt strange, just strange because I knew that my life was not going to be the same anymore.

I wondered then, just how many people knew about me — why didn't mama or papa tell me the truth about myself, at least why didn't papa tell me about it? Between mama and me there was nothing. Sometimes because of the way in which she treated me, I even got the strange feeling that she hated me. I know that to her and even to some of the peasants, I appeared to be cold and unfeeling. But they were wrong. And so because of their crude thoughts about me, I just cried and hurt a little more. But papa knew me — he even knew just what I felt inside and to compensate for all I was suffering, he often tried to be both a mother and father to me. But I did not need his kind of mother's love. Then too, I noticed that papa and I, we were drifting farther and farther apart, because he was turning more often to his fields and then there was no one around to whom I could have turned to. "Anyone who condemn me is wrong, and I will show them!" I said determinedly.

It was near Christmas when we discovered that mama was ill — it was a sad thing to see her lying there flat on her back so often times I would go over to offer her some comforting words but then she would turn away and cry on her bible. Mama was dying daily. Physically there was nothing that the doctor could find wrong with her, yet, mama was dying slowly but surely.

The days before Christmas were running out and there was still quite a lot of work to pull through. It was whilst I was storing the wine and fruit in the cellar, that I happened to come across mama's bank book. I idly flicked through the pages of the book knowing that I might not like the outcome because my heart was thudding fearfully. Yet, there was an urgency that kept my fingers moving. Nearing the end I discovered that there was an amount totalling thirty thousand dollars. Where and from what source did mama obtain that amount of money, and how did she manage to start this banking account, since there were no banks in Charlieville the year the money was registered. Then it suddenly came back to me all in a rush, yes, the words which my history teacher Miss Pete had spoken to me that day on the hill. "You are different Stephen, You are a lunatic." Then I dropped the book back into the straw and left utterly shaken and miserable. Could it be

that Miss Pete's message was finally driving home? After all she said I was different, so what did I know about counting even a few numbers.

To me and also to papa I appeared to be a normal man. At least he never let on to whether he knew that anything was wrong with me. Could it be that my papa, my friend was deceiving me? "What if Miss Pete is wrong, please God, please let her be wrong," I prayed. What about my dreams about taking my mama and papa away with me to the big city, were they to be forgotten by just those few words which Miss Pete spoke to me?

Climbing carefully through the shrubs and bushes, I reached at last under the big saman tree, and looked down at the school house. I wondered then if History was being taught at that moment. Then, who was she reading about, Shakespeare? No, not on a Tuesday. Well then, maybe it would be about Sir Henry Morgan and his raids amongst ships and towns. I knew about him but she would never believe. All that she believed in and reminded me constantly of was my being different. When would I get to show them that I am not different? I felt then as if I were in a trap and could not get out. I knew that the tears were flowing easily from my eyes but I did not care because I was far away from the evil snares of men. I did not know for how long I was asleep but suddenly, I was aware of a human form bending over me. Eagerly I opened my eyes and there was this girl. I looked puzzled at her and then I saw it. I saw a new life beginning for me through her. Her skin was black — yes she was different and I was free! free! free! Funny how I often saw those people with their black skin and wooly hair and never thought anything about it. But now Miss Pete would have to know that I am not different, because my skin is like hers and even my hair is the same. Yes those negroes in Charlieville and the big cities are different. They are just ignorant factory hands and garbage collectors. Oh yes, they are different. Then through my tears of joy I shouted out to her letting her know that she is different, telling her that she is the one who will never obtain her freedom from people like Miss Pete and the city folks. But then something strange happened, she began to cry and ran down the hill. What was wrong with her? Her skin was different from anyone else's in Charlieville and I was free. Through my tears, I saw and heard her crying as she ran down the hill.

But I was wrong, I still was not free as Mary the negro girl told

me later, as we were sitting on 'my' hill. We just sat there in uncomfortable silence amongst the shrubs and bushes. For sometime, I noticed that I was getting to dread those meetings with Mary because it was getting to be embarrassing for us both. I loved Mary but she did not or could not return my love, so I thought it wise not to profess my love for her. Maybe she knew that it was not wise to fall in love with me, since I was known as the village's lunatic and the relationship between her people and the city folks was somewhat strained. She often said to me: "Stephen the whole village has branded you a lunatic, so it would never change. Look, your people scorn me and my people but I am not ashamed because I have grown accustomed to their dirty stares and hurtful remarks".

Mary did not understand, it was alright with her people because everybody, knew that they were different. The way the city folks treated them was justified because that is the way it was in the beginning and that is the way it is going to stay forever! No, she just could not understand the great need in me to get back at Miss Pete and to stop the untrue things she was beginning to convince people about me. I had to get back my rights of being a perfectly normal man, even if it meant being as one of the peasants.

Although the years which passed were happy ones for me because of the deep secret attraction I had for Mary, I could not tell mama or papa of my happiness, Papa was growing sad over mama's illness and mama was growing sad just waiting for death's call, and besides I could not. I never understood mama, she was a very strange woman.

I remember once, when I was very small, mama and papa took me to church and when the pastor was half way through his sermon mama got up and ran out from the church, so papa and I had to follow.

Then there is this other occasion when mama showed her strange behaviour once again It was around harvesting time when there was a feast for thanks because the good Lord had showered his blessings on the peasants and all the fields had yielded plenty and the village was happy. The pastor was invited and he prayed that we would always reap a full harvest, and that we would enjoy happiness amongst us peasants and most of all amongst our families. Wine was passed around, and I could of seen that it had entered my papa's head and so into the heads of most of the other peasants. For the first time I was really

happy when I saw papa ambling over to mama and me with love in his eyes. Love for mama and me, love for the whole village and most of all, love for life. As he reached us he rested his hands on both our shoulders and sighed a happy relaxed sigh but then mama shrugged away her shoulders and papa's hand fell off as quickly as it was placed on her shoulders, then mama ran out from under the large tent, into the dark night.

I watched papa as he sat there with his hands propping his chin. He sat there watching his friends as they hugged their wives and children lovingly. Just the three of us and we could not make it, maybe that was because mama did not want us to make it. I could not stand there seeing the hungry anguished look of love for a family which papa darted over to his friends. I went over to him, placed my hands on his shoulders and then said: "Papa it is alright, everything is okay because I am still here." Then he placed his hands on my own and said without raising his eyes, "I know son, I know that you will always be here, but go and find your mama. Many times I have been getting close to her but she would only lose herself again — Go son and really bring her home this time because we could still make it." "Yes papa, I often see you making attempts to reach her but she never wants to come — maybe she does not want there to be unity amongst us," I said solemnly. With a hurt angry voice he cried out saying: "Son! never say such a thing ever again about your mama. Don't you see that she is trying to love us in her own way and maybe too, as she really should? Look son, there was a time when your mama was a sprightly little woman and I loved her dearly because she brought me a lot of happiness. To me she brought in the sunshine into Charlieville, but then it all vanished away when the women folk of Charlieville came into our lives. Son, I don't know just where the woman whom I have married has gone to. I would like to find her someday and really bring her home. I will like her to know that I still love her and care for her. Go son, maybe it is you whom she really needs, maybe she is searching for you through those holy books that she reads. Go son and really bring her home this time — son, I am counting on you."

Although the urge to leave Charlieville was still with me, I did not think about it as much since Charlieville was moving with the times. I had obtained a job with the only stone quarry at the outskirts of the

village, and although my job was hard there, I did not mind the difficult times because it was better than working in the fields with my papa. I know that he was not in favor of my working there, since I was bringing disgrace to him. Papa was the head of the village and as the leader, there ought not to be any flaws or disputes within his family. After all, ought not he to be the one to heal all internal family conflicts? But I knew that if I had only tried to work in the fields I was going to tire of it soon because I felt that I was not cut out to be a man of the soil.

But my happiness was not to be for very long. Mama always told me that things will never go straight for me. Then that hot day once more my world came tumbling down around me. "Stephen, I had a report on you from Miss Pete immediately after you left work yesterday afternoon," my boss informed me when I went to report for work the following day. I was wondering just why he was telling me all this when he continued saying: "she told me about you Stephen, she told me that I have got dynamite in my hands. I am sorry Stephen my boy, but I will have to demote you before there is any danger. Funny how I never noticed this even thought that you had the makings of a good foreman." Then he shuddered noticeably and said, "boy, am I lucky that I was told this thing before it is to late." I wanted to shout many things at him. Why didn't he notice that I am a lunatic before the visit from Miss Pete. Why couldn't he show me in what way he to was convinced that I am a lunatic? Then as if reading my thoughts, he said hastily, "she was your teacher Stephen, she ought to know". Yes she was my teacher and maybe she ought to know, but why couldn't I be convinced? Even my co-workers heard and treated me differently. After all they were the city folks and I was the only peasant working there, where I did not belong. It was then that I knew that I was always going to hate the city folks.

On my job things became difficult for me and they were going from bad to worse after my boss's death. Then I thought that I might have been losing my sanity because I knew that his death did not have to be, only if my co-workers had given me a hearing.

For weeks I had notice that the shaft over the tunnel was becoming loose, so I brought it to the attention of the others but they only shouted at me to mind my own business and go bring the water buckets. Then one afternoon just as everyone excluding the boss had just checked out, debris from the huge tunnel began to fall, and the boss lay there, trapped and hurt under the swinging shaft.

Everybody just stood there with petrified looks on their faces and did nothing. "Do something!" I shouted out to them but they just stood there as before doing nothing. I saw them that I had to do something because the shaft was descending dangerously closer and also at a terribly fast rate towards the boss. I darted from amongst the crowd and began to make my way up the sides of the jagged tunnel.

I knew then that it was going to be a difficult as well as a riskful climb. But then I had to do it for two reasons. First to save my Boss's life and secondly, I thought that if I was able to do so this might help to give me back my rights to being a perfectly normal man.

My hands were torn and many times as I slipped, I would look down at the crowd and see the look of no hope, of doom swimming before me in their eyes. Then as I reached the swinging shaft I looked down at my boss and it seemed to me that he manage a weak grin. "Dear God please let me make things alright for him. Look at him, he has put all his trust and hope in me to make things alright and I am doing the same with God", I whispered.

I saw the shaft coming my way swiftly. I stretched out my aching, bleeding hand but my movement was too slow. This I did for several times and at each try I had to descend because the shaft was going dangerously closer and also at a terribly fast rate towards the injured man. I was getting exhausted very quickly and also was feeling nauseated to top it off. "I must not fail him nor myself, I've got to remember just how many things are at stake." I said between my swollen lips. Again I saw the shaft coming my way and once again I lunged towards it. At last I did get it! But then the terrifying moans of the bystanders told me that I had failed once again. Then I felt and knew nothing because I had entered into the deep dark wonderful sea of darkness.

When I came to, I discovered that I was not alone because I saw that every section of the divided people of my village had come to the scene of the tragedy. The city folks were talking excitedly and angrily to the miners. This was a matter which was their concern. One of their people was dead and it was all because of a lunatic peasant who wanted to prove to the village that they were wrong in condemning him a lunatic. The peasants were there and so too were the few negroes, but

they were all in the back as they had to be. There they all stood. Three groups of different people separated for one reason or another, reasons that could never or would never make them join as one.

No, I was not alone because my papa was there besides me. He was there patting my wounds tenderly and telling me that he knew that I did my best. Telling and assuring me that what had happened was not through any fault which I had made. But the city folks did not think like my papa. They were calling me jinx and also they were saying that if I did stay where I belonged none of what had happened was going to be. The peasants did not say anything, neither did the negroes but I knew that they were agreeing with the city folks. They just would not understand that I did not want to belong to the kind of life which was meant to be the life of the villagers.

Papa patted and dressed the wounds on my hands, he was helping them to heal, but he could not dress nor heal the biggest wound of all, the wound in my heart which I am sure that time will never heal.

Mama died the month I was going to be twenty one. I felt no loss nor grief for the two days that she laid there, twisted with what could have been imaginary pain, on her death bed. Nor did I feel anything when she requested that I be alone with her. She laid there staring at me — maybe she was thinking about the years she spent with me. Maybe she regretted them bitterly. I wished then, that there was a time when I brought some happiness to her. Ha! who could ever be happy when there was a lunatic in their life to marr their chances of happiness? I sat besides her and let her grasp my hands. Her nails bit into my flesh, but I did not pull away because I was afraid that by my doing so it might help to spoil the last minutes that we were to be together.

She closed her eyes and said, "Stephen I tried to love you, but could not. Because of you I am dying. Stephen would you ever see why I really could not love you? But I swear to god that I really did try" In mama's eyes I saw the tormented look brought on by her knowing that she was dying and still hated me. I felt sorry for her, I could not bear to look in those tormented eyes, so I freed my hands and went to stand by the window. "Stephen do not run away from your mama, stay at my side and watch me die, stay Stephen and watch your work end with satisfaction." I did not make any attempt to go to her. She did not know just what she was saying! I had to make myself believe

that. "Stephen do you hear me," mama shouted across at me. I nodded. "What did I do that was so wrong to have a cross like you to bear, Why was I punished in this way — I hate you" she gasped and then she died. In spite of all that, I kissed her closed eyes and went to pronounce her dead to the crowd outside.

It was on a miserable day that mama was buried — I looked around to see who had come. I saw the nanny, the man who owned the general store and Mary — Mary whose eyes held sadness. Although mama and Mary belonged to different races and even different worlds. I know that Mary was feeling mama's death even more than I was and maybe that was because they shared some of the same religious belief. For me mama had died a very long time ago. The fat frightened mixed up person whom I often saw lying on the bed with her eyes staring and mouth moving deftly, with the unspoken words from the huge Bible, was just a reminder of the woman whom I called and regarded as mama so very long ago.

Mary knew of love and hate because she lived it every day in the village streets and in the churches on the hills, where she and the other negroes abode. I wanted to reach over and comfort her, but how could I have done so when I was just a lunatic? Then when I saw her face light up with the big smile, I knew that she was already comforted by knowing that mama was going way up there beyond the sky where she would be happy.

I saw papa standing alone but I did not go over to comfort him. I left him lost and tormented in his grief. Then too, I did not know how to comfort him. Poor papa knew that things would never be the same in the village for him again with mama gone, the two of us drifting apart and the changing of the village, how could things be the same for him or any other peasant? Where were the clean cut village kids? They were there in the village but they were being swallowed up by the city folks way of life by their dress and behaviour. Never could one see a peasant child's face in the fields because the fields were being done by the peasant parents themselves and with the help of a few hired hand negroes.

Never could one see young boys playing baseball in the fields with the young girls of Charlieville cheering lustily at their sides. The boys and girls were there in Charlieville but they were in pubs and bars — they were lost to their parents. The village was indeed changing

rapidly, with the sudden immoral behaviour of the peasants children who were causing their parents uncountable heartaches and grief.

With Papa, I stayed there on the hill to comfort him, I stayed there at his side but he did not need me. His head was buried in the soft brown earth whilst his hands groped for mama's head stone. I saw that his head was moving from side to side with the painful grief that he was feeling, yet no tears flowed from his blank eyes, nor was there a crumpled line on his ashen face. But yet I knew that he was crying for the woman who shut her door to seclusion completely in his face when he was just gaining entrance. Yes, he was indeed crying for mama.

I knew that it would have happened, only I did not know just how it took this long. Soon after mama's death someone found papa lying apparently hurt in his fields. He suffered a stroke and the local doctor ordered him to retire forthwith. That was a big blow for papa because never before had this happened to anyone else. But papa regarded his health more than any amount of wealth, so he retired and raised a small poultry farm which thrived despite the uselessness of his left hand. But he was not happy. How could my papa be happy when he had such fine plans and dreams for his fields after his death only to find that they had died before him? Papa wanted me to take over his fields after his death. I now recall the words which he spoke to me concerning his fields after he was gone. "Stephen the time is near when I must kiss this land good — bye then it would be all yours so come to the fields and help me to till the soil and feel how it feels to hold your very own soil through your fingers". But I did not go to watch my papa and so I had put an end to his dreams. Dreams which made every father a proud man in Charlieville. Papa was a very devoted peasant at least he had to be in order to be the peasants leader. But then the city folks came and with them they brought along their so called progress which was to put an end to the Charlieville as we the peasants knew it. To some of the peasants the change was good, it was welcomed. But to papa, the nanny and to the rest of the 'true earth peasants' it was total destruction to Charlieville. And I didn't help my papa any, by turning away from him.

I saw the car as it came speeding along the dirt track. Everyone knew that car — why shouldn't they? Since that car was bought with the money my mama had left Miss Pete, the money which had every

tongue wagging and was also causing my papa heartbreak and grief because he had lost the respect and love of most of the villagers, since they thought that he also had money but was playing the part of a poor peasant just to have a good laugh at them. Two white hens skirted across the road as the car came to a stop in front of our gate.

"Stephen!" I heard my name being called. I looked around and she beckoned for me to come over to her, but I turned back to the gate I was white washing and began to move the brush vigorously. "Stephen!" I heard my name being called warningly and that time I covered the tin knowing that she would have made papa very mad if he had seen her. I went over to her and there she sat in her fifteen thousand dollar car looking very sure of herself. "Stephen I would like to speak to you and it would be very wise if you would give me a hearing because what I have got to say concerns your papa's welfare", she said calmly. "Miss Pete neither papa nor I would like to hear what you have to say after so much has happened because of you". I said in a matter of fact way. But Miss Pete did not care because she knew that the odds were against me, since it might have disturbed papa if he had seen her. At last I had to give in when she began to speak at the top of her voice. "Let us say that about nine would do you fine wouldn't it Stephen?" Any hour would have done me fine if that meant an earlier departure by Miss Pete.

That night after I kissed papa's tuft-like cheeks and tucked him into his bed, I told him that I was going out and might not be back for quite a while; "Stephen," he called after me, "whatever happened to you and the negro girl?" "We had a quarrel papa," came my reply. "Was it about her colour again Stephen?" "No papa," was my reply. Then knowing that I might be detained by his questions and counselling. I assured him that it was nothing to worry about and then I left shutting the door noiselessly behind me. Papa was anxious to see me get married even if it meant that I be married to a negro. Maybe he thought that if I were to be married especially to Mary, I might even turn back to a life in the soil.

Poor papa, how sad his eyes were. They seemed as though they held a whole lifetime of trouble. Maybe he had dreams of the village as it once used to be. Of its people being together again. Of the intruders who were the city folks going back to their big city and to

their wicked ways of living. Of the negroes leaving our village and taking their unhappiness with them. But, how long could these dreams last him. How long could he enjoy happiness from those stolen hours from reality? Then when those dreams were over and he had to face reality once again, it would have hurt even more, when he discovered that he had tried to cover up the ugly situation with cheap dreams and make belief.

Yes, at that moment I knew that I loved papa with a fierceness that would have made me do anything at all to see him happy. But then when I faced reality and I pictured myself being just the plain lunatic that I was being forced to believe I am, everything changed and that also brought me to the realisation of how my life was becoming one of pure misery.

I tried to hate mama, I tried to close my mind to the good things which she did for us and tried to bring all the unpleasant memories to the light. But only the good things came to my mind and that was because my mama was not really a bad woman. My mama was a plump short woman with rosy cheeks and brown eyes which always held a faraway expression, as if she was trying to reach something that she could not find in this world. Maybe what she was seeking was faraway beyond the clouds — it had to be somewhere there, because on several occasions when the night was dark and there were few stars scattered across the heavens she would look up and cry. Yes my mama would cry. I hope and wish that she find just what she was seeking beyond there. Mama once told me that all good people go there when they die. I inquired how up there was like and she said, "Stephen, there is a kingdom which Jesus has prepared for his people. It is a place where happiness goes on turning like a wheel." Her eyes shone as she hugged the bible to her breast — but then her eyes became clouded as she ran inside. I watched her as she ran — there were tears in her eyes but there was no need for her to shed tears because she would reach there, wouldn't she God!" I muttered fiercely.

I stopped as I reached Miss Pete's house. It was freshly painted in white and the garden showed signs that it had just been mowed. Maybe all that was done with my mama's money. Why did she do this to us, to papa? Maybe to hurt him because I hurted her by being born. I know that mama would never try to hurt papa directly, yet, that was the hurtful thing that was done. I wondered then if she could only see the

misery on his face, from what did she say, kingdom? Poor mama — poor papa too.

There she was standing by the door. I wondered for what length of time had she been standing there. Maybe she saw me from the moment that I arrived. I wished that she would wipe that foolish smile from her face. I felt sick to my stomach and began to retch. "Stephen what is it, what is the matter!" Miss Pete's excited voice came floating down the stairs. I felt horrible and I did not want her to fuss over me so I said truthfully, "I did not take all my dinner because I was afraid that you might come by again thinking that I had changed my mind and you know that I did not want that don't you." "It is all because of your papa isn't it Stephen? But there is no longer any need for us to be enemies Stephen. Why doesn't he understand that? Look I want peace that is why I demanded that you should see me tonight," she said simply.

Inside she gave me some warm tea which made me feel better. Then we sat in silence with her looking curiously at me. I wished that she would wipe that foolish smile off her face. What was she thinking, what was she seeing? Maybe she was seeing a man who was born to bring pain, not to himself but to others.

A man who brought pain to his papa when he refused to promise him that he was going to tend to his fields after his death — a poor sick man who had to live with that knowledge until his death. How long had he to live? Maybe a few years but what if he lived for long years to come? I wished then that I was dead but then wouldn't that bring him pain? More too, knowing that the wretch was put to rest whilst he had to carry on with a useless left hand.

"Stephen I will like to help you, knowing that you will not be able to help your papa any longer," Miss Pete's voice cut into my thoughts. She continued saying: "You would not be working in the mine any longer Stephen, I have talked it over with your boss and we have decided that you are a danger to the other miners. I am sorry Stephen but I am doing all this to protect you," she tried to assure me. Once I had promised to show the whole village that I am not different but what was the use when everybody thought differently. Now she was offering me more of that cursed money. "Fifty more Stephen?" she asked. She did not understand that I would not take any amount of that money which mama gave to her.

With an angry grief stricken cry Miss Pete cried out and said, "please Stephen, please think about your papa and what you would be doing to him if you do not accept my help. You are acting like the stupid lunatic that you are supposed to be. You destroy Stephen, that is just what you do, you destroy people! You destroyed your mother and you are going to destroy your papa but I would not see to that — I will not stand aside and let him be destroyed by the likes of you!"

Then I looked on Miss Pete's face and I saw it, I saw the tears as it came flowing furiously from between her half closed eyelids. Then I hated myself because I had made someone else cry. Mama was right when she said that I am a curse. I looked again at Miss Pete's face, there were lines of pain there, her eyes were clouded. Maybe she was not bad, maybe she was just as good as my mama was. Poor Miss Pete, under the businesslike face I saw the misery that she hid there. I could not hurt another not just yet, not ever. I went across to her and held her bony hard fingers between my strong tough ones. Maybe she was going to find some warmth in my own. She looked at me questioningly, her eyes probing into my own. I smiled and in my smile I knew that she saw the answer. But to reassure her I told her that anytime she was ready I would be willing and able. "Oh Stephen!" she whispered. At last I had brought happiness to someone. I wished that if only mama was there to see it all. Only if she could have seen me from behind those dark foreboding skies. Miss Pete eyes were shining too, I could not stand the emotionalism any longer so I grabbed her in my arms. Oh yes, that woman was a projection of mama.

"Mama, oh mama, you are here," I whispered. But then the form which I had held ever so fondly in my arms turned rigid. My short sweet dream was ended abruptly and then I knew that it was Miss Pete whom I had held in my arms. I looked around the room and saw the heavy polished mahogany furniture. There were no shining golden candlesticks which mama had told me about, and I was not floating on any cloud. I heard the sweet music for the few minutes I held Miss Pete in my arms, but now there was this choking hot air which seemed to envelope me.

Miss Pete held me at a distance and said, "Stephen in the future do not get emotionally upset with me, I am not your mother and please remember that!" I just could not understand it all. For a few moments

she acted so much like mama but she then soon returned again to the Miss Pete I knew — cruel and mean. Then I got up and ran out of her house.

My hill looked different as I had not been there for quite awhile. I stood at the top and looked down at the village. It was now four years since I had spoken to Mary and also four years since mama's death. Besides Mary did not need me. She had gotten a job with one of the owners of Charlieville's restaurant and that paid her well. Then too, Mary was avoiding me because she did not want to bring any more trouble for her people being involved with me. Once I had told Mary that she was different but she was surviving because there were millions of people with her colour, and there were a few of them in Charlieville but I was alone in the village. I looked down at the pastor's house — although it was hardly visible with the neon lights of the cinema and restaurant, the red lights of the flickering candle was still twinkling brightly on his window. Nobody cared about the pastor or his sermon anymore. I used to think that they were right to do so because he would often talk about God and his healings, yet he had let my mama die. But then I would remember the kingdom mama had talked about where all good people go when they had died, then knowing that she is there I would pity the parson.

Chapter 2

I was just turning the last clod of earth in Miss Pete's large flower garden when she drove up with her nephew Andrew. He was the child of her unfortunate sister who had perished together with her husband in a ravishing fire that gutted their small farm house. As Miss Pete was the only other relative she offered to take the child, but rather reluctantly.

The boy came out of the car like a scared rabbit. He stood in front of the gate with his eyes wide with fright. He then looked up at the big house. Maybe he saw it as I once did, and still do at times -- Maybe he saw it as a big monster, with tightly closed mouth not welcoming strangers. Suddenly Miss Pete prodded him with the shabby suitcase -- it seemed empty. He looked at me as he passed and suddenly, suddenly there was a smile that covered up his haggard innocent face. That was a smile which was revealing something wonderful to me. Something like, he wanted me to be his friend but not knowing what to do about it. He wanted someone to look after him like his mama and papa once did, and he chose me. Yes, he chose me and that made me feel very happy for at that time I was feeling lost and utterly alone. I had said inwardly, "oh Andrew you do not know just what a difficult task you have entrusted me to do, but I appreciate it, because from now on you are going to take care of me as I need somebody so very much. Although you are but a child you will be able to do it. I am counting on you Andrew. But, then if one day you should find out about me, if you should find out that I am leaning on you and also using you, I hope that it would not matter much to you then, because you will have grown to love me and also that you will have understood just why I have used you in that way. I love you Andrew".

As he was about to go into the house, he looked across at me, maybe he did so to see if I was still looking at him. "You do not have to be afraid for me dear Andrew because I will never leave you, you will always be there when I need you, because I will be needing you more than I ever needed anybody". I mouthed these words over to him. Then with an uplifted chin he strode into the house, and shut the door behind him. "Poor fellah, I like him and I am going to see that Miss Pete does not shut him up in her house of doom," I said fiercely.

It had been two weeks since papa got that heart attack and had to be hospitalised. Papa got that attack when I told him that I was leaving

his house and going to Miss Pete's where I would become her gardener. But he was not in an ordinary hospital where on getting well he would have been free to leave and start his poultry farm once again. He was in a sanitarium because it was said that he was cracking up. Papa got that attack because of me. He looked then as if he had seen a ghost when I told him of my plans, but then his countenance changed and he went to look through the window which was overlooking the fields he once owned. I knew just what he was thinking about! He was thinking about the happy life which he and mama led before I came along and brought heartaches and miseries with me. He was also thinking that although the village was changed the other men still had their sons working with them in the fields, even their wives helped too. Mama was gone and I still lived on, but yet was not at his side — I was an outsider.

Yes I know that he was thinking about the times when he worked at his father's side, for on times like those he often said to me, "Stephen, on days when there was rain, to me the sun would come out and take away the darkness from over our village." Then he would remind me of the very first time when mama and I worked at his side. Then I would cry inside for the ugly monster that I had become. Then I would feel even worse when he would start reliving the very first time I witnessed a drought in the village. I remembered it only too well. All the crops were parched and I had talked to mama about our leaving the village and making it in the big city. Then she had shooed me away, warning me that I must never let my papa know about the evil things which go on in my mind.

Then there was this feast for thanks because the good God had showered the village with rain once again. Then papa had taken me in his arms — I wonder now if he remembered that too, if he remembered just what he had said to me concerning his fields after his death. At that time I had felt horrible because I knew that I was not going to carry out his wishes. But now there is really no need for me to harbour any guilty feelings, because all the villagers had branded me a lunatic.

Everybody knew it, everybody knew that I was completely innocent and I was free! free! free! Maybe I got that feeling because Miss Pete's always chilling voice would come back to me saying, "you sent him in there Stephen and you killed your mother — she was dying a slow death for twenty years."

Papa had said to me, "Stephen that woman is evil — please hear your papa!" But I would not believe him. I forced myself to believe that she was a good woman. At least I had to. How could I have faced reality when I knew that Andrew was in her care and also his and my happiness? No! I could not have faced the truth, so I said, "papa you do not understand her, at a time I did not also, she is just as good a woman as mama was and I will show you and the whole village if you only would allow me some time." He came rushing at me like a mad man, and instead of hitting me as I thought he surely was going to do, he gently placed his hands on my shoulders and said wearily, "Stephen please hear your papa, he is right — that woman is going to destroy you, yes, she certainly will!"

"My life is full of broken promises but this one I am going to keep," I said to papa. Miss Pete is a good woman. They must not condemn her before I act. I shook my head in a helpless disturbingly manner and with that little gesture papa saw my answer — he said nothing but left to go and stand by the window like he always did when he felt sad. He was going back to sit by the window and think about mama and the happy times that they had before I came along to marr their happiness. But he never had a chance to think about the happy times they had without me the lunatic because he slumped to the floor with his face a pallor complexion.

I stopped as I neared the entrance of the sanitarium. Although there were brightly coloured flowers and trees with birds whistling happily, to me the sanitarium appeared like a prison. There were no neon lights, no traffic jams or no children playing in the streets. Oh no, just the faint hooting of the trains which were miles away.

People were going through the gates in a steady flow. They were carrying large bunches of roses under their arms or just presents. The faces that came through the gates were full of concern — they were going to stand by the sides of their loved ones. I looked back at the big black enforcing iron gates which seemed to be looming up towards the sky. Quickly I made some retreating steps, and at the same time looked around at the surroundings. I looked up at the iron vents which were supposed to serve as windows for papa and the other patients, and then at the single door against the drab grey building. Then I looked again at the gates. What if they were to close behind me never to open

again? Indeed! they seemed to be closing everybody in. I knew that I could or should not be locked up inside, whilst Andrew was on the outside. I turned around and began to hurry out. As I hurried the people stood to watch me. I could not catch the words of what they were saying, but as I neared the gate I bumped into the nanny: "Sonny what is it, what is the matter, is it your papa, is he dead?" she asked excitedly. "My papa is he dead you ask me when I did not even go in to see him. I am not going in to see him now, nor never will do so because these gates are going to shut me in," I told her.

"Sonny let us go in to him now, let us go to him together because we can make it. How precious that word 'together' seemed then, but it was much too late for any togetherness. Instead I said to her, "my mama is gone, papa is still here but he is very far away — it is now too late besides there wasn't any togetherness when mama was here." "There wasn't any sonny, because your mama was not strong enough to share or encourage any," the nanny put in lamely. "But she did not even try, she hated us, she did not want to be a part of us! And I hated her too, because she hurt my papa by refusing him, she helped to bring him to this weak wilting old man that he has become!" I shouted angrily at her. "Sonny please, you must not hate her, you would not understand, but she was a very unhappy woman." I wanted to accuse mama of being her own tormentor and also Papa's, but I did not do so just then.

By that time a large crowd had gathered around us. A little boy came up to me and handed me the roses I had dropped. I took them with trembling fingers and shouted to the crowd: "You fools get out of here before it is too late. Don't you see that the gates are going to shut you in!"

"Look about you, do you see the neon lights, do you see the faces of happy children playing in the streets?" "He must be a patient," a woman standing in the crowd shouted. "Call a doctor!" she shouted again. I saw and received the sympathetic glances of the bystanders, but I did not need them.

"Sonny please go to your papa because it will help a great deal — I just know that it will," the nanny pleaded with me. "With these roses give papa my love — he will understand," I told her. "Sonny please," she said again, but that time I hushed her with my finger on her lips and walked out from the hospital grounds. As I reached out, I looked in

from behind and prayed, "Dear God, please do something, do not let them be doomed this way." But the people still moved on — they were all doomed.

Some cars passed with their headlights flickering sadly and then there was no other life on the street except for the dog and the cat on either side. "Sonny where are you going now?" the nanny asked, interrupting my sad thoughts. "To Miss Pete, she will take care of me," I answered her. "Sonny she will destroy you and that is her only aim. Yes, she certainly will if you allow her to do so." Then she said quietly after looking stealthily around her, "by destroying you, she knows that your papa will be crushed completely. Do not give her the chance to destroy him through you." "Why would she do such a thing! she loves me, she loves me as though I am her son!" I cried out angrily. But the nanny did not answer, she left holding the roses to her breast and wiping her eyes with the large green faded kerchief. Papa had warned me too, he had said, "Stephen please leave her house before it is too late — that woman is evil, she will only destroy you."

I thrust my hands deep into my pockets and moved on. I did not know to where I was going, but I had to leave the quiet surroundings, I had to get away from it all. I ended back in the middle of the village where I would always go to give myself up to the heavy traffic, when my life became too much of a responsibility for me.

I stopped at the restaurant's door. Surprisingly there were few people within. Where were the teenagers? Maybe they were off some other place seeking new pleasures. The place felt lonely. Yes, where had they all gone to? I felt deep into my pockets and discovered that there was only one shilling within. "With this I could buy an ice cream cone," I said to myself. I then turned away but discovered that I could not leave. I had to see what was in there that brought out the forceful smiles on those faces. What made them appear so happy and care free when they were not — at least nobody is ever happy.

"What would you like to have?" the girl at the bar asked loudly. "A cone," I shouted back above the noise. She came closer and asked amusingly, "where is the miserable one." "I am he," I answered gruffly because I was somewhat annoyed of what was going on. She raised her eyebrows and then asked slowly in disbelief, "A cone for you mister and not a beer or a scotch and water?"

Maybe what I was saying suddenly dawned on her when she saw that I was shaking my head from side to side with much annoyance, for she said disgustedly, "Mister why come in here for a cone when there is a cart outside?" The man on my right held on tightly to his beer and drew it closer to his lips.

Amidst the confusion the owner came over to her and whispered something. She then shrugged her shoulders and went to the back.

"Uncle Joe! Uncle Joe," I called out excitedly to the owner. He turned around sharply and walked over to me. "You called me uncle Joe," he asked in a puzzled tone. "Yes, I did, I am Stephen, Harold's son" I answered, angry at myself because it was now plain to me that he could not remember me or maybe he did not know of which Harold I was speaking about. Suddenly a light of recognition crossed his face. "Oh yes, Harold — I have heard that the old man has gotten himself into the 'mad house', heard too that it was his lunatic son's doing" he said almost to himself.

"I told Harold that he is a curse, in fact everybody did, but he loved that boy too much to listen to anybody or even admit it. Now he is regretting it with his poor wife gone." Then he rushed on saying, "Know something kid? My two sons have gone to the city and they are doing very well there." Then as if he saw my face doubtful to whether I knew them or not, he said hastily, "You know them well — they are Williams and Steve." Yes I knew them very well and maybe that was because their names were called so very often.

Yes, who could forget them when all he did was relate everyone his plans for their future. And this was done especially to papa who knew every detail of the money which he was saving to send them on to college in the city. Then papa would boast, telling him that his Stephen would be the best farmer the village ever had. Yes, his exact words were, "Stephen will be a man of the soil."

I looked across at uncle Joe now as I had come to an end of my thoughts, and saw the mounting terror in his eyes. "Did you say that you are Harold's son? Well then, you are the one since Harold has only one son "Look mister, I am sorry, kinda lost my head, you know with the business going bad and everything." I did not say anything because I was making him pay, by the big drops of sweat which stood out on his forehead. He was afraid of me, the lunatic. I stood

there drinking it all. A few years ago I would have broken down and cried seeing his face this tormented. But at that moment it was different, since I was learning to live with the people who cared the least for me.

My eyes followed to where his bulging ones rested. "Please Stephen, please don't," he begged as he backed away. The room was as still as a funeral parlour and then I knew that it was going to be bad business afterwards. "Why isn't Miss Pete here, why wouldn't she come now that I need her most. Those were the questions spinning around in my mind. I wondered then if she had left me flat but it could not be since she did not know of the trouble I was in. Any way, I knew that I was in plenty of trouble with uncle Harold, since he was considered to be the peasants enemy. Maybe that was because he was the only one who watched the corruption of the peasants children with satisfaction since it meant good business for his liquor store.

This time I did not feel as though my world was closing in on me, but the people were. I was there bearing all the hate which they felt for me. Maybe I was paying for all the wrong that I did to mama and papa and all the pain that I brought to them. Mama was dead and papa locked up. I recalled the evening I last saw papa before I went to the bar:

I gave the nanny the roses I usually brought along for papa and waited for him to come and stand by the window. When he did, I saw that his hair and even his beard was now grown long. He looked then, as one of the prophets whom mama used to read about each night by the window. He stood tall and straight as though he was ready to meet mama in that faraway kingdom beyond the sky, where the two of them will hold hands and look down upon the earth. Papa will look at his fields which had now become barren but there will be no tears. NO, there will never more be tears, since all the tears were shed when he was mingled with the evils of the earth. Mama too, she will be happy there — her bible will be closed now that she is in the bible land. Never more will her eyes hold that faraway expression — never more a tear will she shed. The nanny believed that too, she believed that mama and papa will be re-united there, where they will be happy together.

He waved at me and I waved back. I could have seen the smile which covered his tired wrinkled face. He beckoned for me to come into the hospital grounds but I could not go, because I knew that the gates were going to shut me in, never to open again. Then papa covered

his wrinkled face with his hands — the hands that did wonderful things, the hands which worked for us and built a family home. But now they were useless. Yess, behind those once very valuable hands tears were flowing. I held fast to the gate for support of the sobs which wracked my body. "Mama, please you've got to understand," I said between clenched teeth. "I did not mean for him to cry mama, mama you have got to understand that. Look at papa, he is all gone but I am young yet mama. Mama listen to me! Mama do you hear me?" I shouted up at the sky.

Miss Pete tapped me on my shoulders. She had finally arrived, but I did not care anymore. I wanted to feel some of the pain which mama once felt. I wanted her to leave me alone and maybe then and only then mama might have been satisfied when I shared some of the pain that I gave to her.

"Stephen I am here, I never meant to desert you," Miss Pete said. But I did not care anymore. I wanted to stand on my feet and to face the responsibility that I had: Oh, if she only knew just how much I wanted her to leave me alone. But instead she stood there waiting on the moment when I would say that everything was being left to her. Mama was waiting too, she was waiting on the answer that I could not give, the answer that I will never give. Then I knew that it was no use my asking her forgiveness. I looked up at Miss Pete, my life was in her hands and I knew that from then on my life would be in her hands always. I saw the triumph in her eyes, triumph because she had overcome mama, the nanny and most of all, papa. He held on for a very long time, but when he saw that he was getting no help from me, he gave up. Yes, Miss Pete had finally won the first round of her strange battle with those three people. For a very long time she had been trying to strike out at those three people — to hurt them. Maybe that was because they were considered to be the leaders of the village until the city folks came and took things over. Then Miss Pete did not want that, she was a ruthless woman who wanted no one to stand in her way. But then, why was she directing her attack through me?

Whatever her purpose was behind the help she was giving me, I did not care because I had already given up hope that one day I would be treated as an equal. Uncle Harold began to get impatient. He suggested that the police be called in. I just sat there with my hands clasped between my legs. My mind was blank, I was neither looking back on

my past or looking forward to my future. My past was full of broken promise and broken hearts. I destroyed all those who cared for me and I will continue to destroy those who insisted in coming in my path. A curse I am, mama once told me that of myself. To me there should never be a tomorrow, there should never be a sunny day, but as the days go by, I will continue living them unwillingly.

Uncle Harold claimed that I whipped the blade from my pocket and was about to attack him when he overcame me. He was lying and I wanted to deny that, but who would believe me? Anyway, I attacked everyone who cared for me and even wounded them. Mama, papa and even Mary, their wounds were wide open and were not likely to close in a long long time.

"Now Stephen please say that the blade is your own and everything will be all over," Miss Pete said simply. I looked at her incredulously and said under my breath, "you know that the blade does not belong to me so why must I claim its ownership?"

Then a little louder she said, "Stephen please do not deny it, it is the only sensible thing to do since you know that I bought it for you at the general store."

I looked around at the people in the bar: Maybe they would give me some assurance that I would be treated as an equal. But no! Most of those people there were once the devoted peasants of Charlieville, who would never allow another villager to suffer any injustice. But now they had no time for me because they were hurrying to catch up with the fastly changing village.

"No I wont do it, I wont condemn myself in this way. Let them do what ever they want to do, let them bring me to justice, because I know that I would win them. Everyone must know that I never did own this blade! Thank you Miss Pete but I must go it alone."

She laughed mirthlessly and said, "Stephen just look around and observe the people in here. Do you honestly think that they would care if you have a fair trial or not? Then what about Andrew, do you care about him?" "Just think about what can happen to him when you are languishing behind some cold prison wall."

"You are afraid of doors and gates but that is what you are going to spend maybe the rest of your days behind if you keep on saying that this blade does not belong to you. Now just you think about it Stephen."

I was shocked angry and hurt — for once in my life I was about to do something on my own and instead of feeling proudly about it, I was made to feel pure humiliation. My hopes were crushed and pride walked on. From then on I was beginning to be convinced that I am really a lunatic. And then I saw how I was out of place in my village and so too, in the whole wide world. It was an accepted fact in Charlie-ville that the negroes just did not belong, but they were people, they were sound minded human beings with different coloured skins. But me? I was nothing! I was not even useful to work in the factories or in the fields as a hired hand like most of the negroes. People like me are just filling up the world and getting into other people's way. I began to wonder just how long it would take them to notice our uselessness to them and then try to eradicate us from their world. And then I saw just how lost and how lonesome we people are. I felt lonely then being the only condemned lunatic in the village. I began to think about the self confirmed lunatics in the city — in the whole wide cruel world. I prayed earnestly then, that they be not the recipients of pitying glances in each and every street in which they happen to walk. I hope too, that one or two of my brothers and sisters would refuse to believe that they are lunatics as I had done for all this time until the truth harshly dawned on me. Then I was hurt, lord how I was hurt!

For twenty seven years I was told in many different ways that I am a lunatic, but refused to believe it. Then when I began gradually to accept it, I saw the damage one malicious tongue, (Miss Pete) had done to me. Then it jolted me when I saw that I could do nothing to defend myself against her lying tongue. Some other person who had been branded a lunatic by his village might have stood a chance, but me? never!

What if somebody out there in this cruel world had been living a life by hiding his true identity suddenly woke up to the truth, what if he or she had a family? "Why lord, why do we have to suffer like this? Why do the negroes have to suffer because they are different by colour alone, why do, they have to suffer because of their so called ugly coloured skins? Maybe you ought to eradicate them because they do not really belong on this earth. There is no place which they can consider as being their rightful place and you know that, don't you God? Please do not let them be judged wrongfully because of their

so called ugly coloured skins. Let them help in tending the land, work it and building their homes. Do not just let them help in building my peoples prides and joys, let them be free to say, this is my home, this is my factory and most of all, this is my country," I begged fervently

Yes, Miss Pete was lying but who would believe me? Uncle Harold wanted revenge. How close he had come to death's door as he thought when he had such a thriving business. Miss Pete too, she was on her way of becoming one of the most popular individuals in Charlie-ville. I wondered if she would help me, now that her continual popularity depended on my being put away. After all most of the people hung out at Uncle Harold's place.

"Stephen please think about Andrew and also of your freedom, there would not be any if you keep on saying that the blade does not belong to you," Miss Pete's words cut into my thoughts. Just to admit that I am a lunatic and my troubles would be all over. Yes all over, and then I would have been freed. My rights did not mean anything much to me now, but my freedom did. I wanted to be with Andrew for always as we had grown to love each other. Without him I had nothing to look forward to. Papa had turned away from me — he had shed the last bitter tears that day by the window. Mama was calling out to him to do so a very long time. Suddenly he heard the call and heeded it.

Suddenly I heard a moan coming from the door way. I saw the nanny holding on to the door post like a wounded animal. Her face was white with pain — all heads were turned in her direction. Many went to her but found that there was nothing physically wrong with her. Miss Pete refilled her glass and went to her. "cheers" she said. The nanny reached out and slapped the extended hand. The glass went crashing to the ground and the drink was spilt all over. Miss Pete laughed and went back smirking at Uncle Harold's side. Then the nanny took out the large green faded 'kerchief and began to wipe the corners of her eyes. I got up and walked out of the bar with my secret. Only I could have read the unspoken words which were written in the message on her painful face. I could not tell anyone that the pain there was for and because of me. "Cheers", she whispered as I passed by her, "Cheers for you and Miss Pete both. You have won this time Stephen, but I will fight you to the end, I swear that I will. Cheers she said again.

Chapter 3

There was merriment in Miss Pete's house because she and uncle Harold had just been wed. The nanny was there and so too, was the man who owned the general store. I did not share in that merriment, neither did Andrew. Instead I took him to my hill. No, I just could not share in it, knowing that I had given away myself so cheaply to her. For my freedom she had said, yet I was not free, and I know now that I would never be.

"Uncle Stephen!" Andrew called out to me and at the same time tugged menacingly at my shirt sleeves. He then continued in a frightful tone of voice, "would you ever marry uncle Stephen? When and if ever you do, please do not leave me with Miss Pete because with her I will be all alone." Little did he know about me, he did not know that the villagers had branded me a lunatic so that left no chance of my ever getting married. He did not know that I had given away my rights to being considered a normal being, and that is because I was afraid of fighting for my rights. I can remember the day when Miss Pete was giving the class our history lesson. She was reading about the great English author Shakespeare and his writings. I soon began day dreaming about him — imagining myself being him and then it happened. She had destroyed my imaginary world with each harsh, cruel word that she hurled at me. I can remember too, how I curled up inside and began to shrink away at everyone of those hurtful yet so very true words that she hurled at me. But I did not stay to defend myself against her brutal tongue and the mocking jeers and laughter of my school-mates, instead I got up and ran to the hill I claimed as mine.

Now I say, that maybe my history teacher was right. Maybe I had no right to have a private life of my own. Maybe I should have been prepared to let other people interfere with my life whenever it pleased them. After all, lunatics are public property. That is the life people like me lead, our lives are not really ours because other people live it for us. That day when I ran away from the school house was the first day that I ran away from my kind of life because I did not understand it. Then too, I knew that it was not going to be the only time since I was sure not going to get accustomed to the kind of life which was mine to live forever.

To Andrew, I had become his hero. Just because I made him happy, since Miss Pete had no time for him. I made him happy just by

being near him when he was feeling low, and I intended to do just that until the day he should find out about me, and I prayed that it would not be soon. I had said to him, "no Andrew, I would not leave you." He did breathe a sigh of relief because of what I revealed to him. How could I have left him when he was the only one whom I lived for, when he was the only one who kept my useless life going on? He did not know it and he would never know that I depended on him a lot, and also that I leaned on him. If ever he should move away I would fall. He was my strength, so I prayed earnestly, "Dear Andrew, please never leave me."

It was not long before uncle Harold had moved in with Miss Pete and I had moved out to the barn, that I noticed Andrew withering away before my eyes. I dismissed the thought that I was incapable of making him feel secure with my love, and convinced myself into believing that Andrew had not gotten over the fact that he had lost his parents so cruelly. Andrew was very close to his parents. Often he will tell me about the village in which he lived — about the farms and the fat happy women. And then I would smile inside for I were on these occasions reminded about mama, although I can't ever remember her being happy.

In Andrew's village, there was a hill just like mine but he never went there except whenever he was running away from doing his chores in the fields. Of course, people who are realists as Andrew and not make-believers in dreams as myself, would never runaway from something that must be faced up to. He asked me one day "Uncle Stephen, did you ever run away to your hill from working in the fields?" But I did not answer him. How could I have confessed to that small boy, a lover of the world that I didn't run away from working in the fields, but from the world and from its people and that I still wanted to run away, but he was preventing me from doing so? Yes I wanted to run away but I love Andrew and he loved the world, then he needed me so I had to go along with him in pretending that I loved the world and its people also, and yet, hating every minute of my pretentious life. But then I knew that soon all the pretence was going to end because Andrew was going to die. At least, that was the strange feeling I always got. Yes, I knew it but could not help him. Or could I?

With Andrew, I stood amongst the throng of people who filled the platform and spilled out even on the train line. Their eyes were

glued to the approaching train in the distance. To them and to Andrew, the person who was arriving was a most important person to Charlieville, as he was going to be the village's Judge and Mayor. I looked at the children with their hair neatly combed and parted. They were dancing and waving their flags, many not knowing or caring to know the reasons for their well scrubbed faces and clothing, but Andrew knew. He knew that the man was coming into Charlieville, to see that everyone had equal rights and also to see that the village was given back to us.

A judge, is what Andrew had hoped to work up his way to become some day. I looked across at him and the same time his eyes caught mine. He smiled for a brief moment, and in that smile, I saw all the hope and surety he had in becoming a judge. Then as he turned away and focused his eyes on the up and coming train, he looked grave. He was not dancing nor was he doing any of the things that the other children were doing. Although he was a child he was always looking seriously into and forward to the future.

The train stopped and a tall grey haired man stepped out. I was still looking at Andrew when I saw his eyes light up. I knew just what he was imagining -- he was imagining himself being the mayor-judge. That he was sending back the city folks and that he was demolishing their cinemas, clubs and restaurants and any other thing they had built upon the peasants fields. He was also imagining that he was sending back the negroes, and with them, their sad songs of their far away place of happiness which they sang about every night in their back yards. The happiness which they could not find in this living but in the next. Then, what was the use of all that moanful singing by the candle light if they could not find that happiness in this, their present life but the next which I am sure they were not really certain off?

Yes, he was imagining that he was sending them back, demolishing their shacks and planting back the shrubs and bushes which we the peasants had known and grown to love. But then in Andrew's eyes I saw that the look of despair had taken the place of happiness and tears began to flow. I wanted to shout over to him that he should hate them as I do, but no one had interrupted his dreams, no one had cut into his dreams and destroyed them as Miss Pete did mine. No, Andrew did not believe in dreams and make believes, he was a realist. He had real

dreams whilst I had only fantasies. It was then that I realised that I was on one of my frequent trips and also one of my best escapades away from reality.

As always I was living in one of my lies, by trying to convince myself that Andrew was the one who was imagining those things, when it was really me. I was only using him as a front.

Would he ever find happiness, I wondered. His happiness would lie in his being a judge. Could he make it? Still looking at him, I whispered, "Dear God let him make it."

The next day the cottage in which the nanny lived was very busy as the people came to offer their congratulations to the mayor who was residing there. By the nanny's request, I was making my way through the throng of people who were gathered on the steps and in the hall-way. Finally after much seeking, I found her, but she was happily chatting away to the man who owned the general store. How happy she looked there then, in her gaily coloured frock. She has bright beady eyes which seemed to dart all over the room at once. I stood there unnoticed by the crowd and really took a good look at the nanny for what I believed was the first time.

For the nanny of the village, she was thin, almost to the point of being bony. Her eyes stood out cold and hard and that gave her the appearance of someone very mean. Maybe all leaders looked that way, because the nanny certainly was not.

Suddenly her beady eyes flashed my way as I knew that they would soon, and she caught me staring at her. She came over to me and behind her was the man who owned the general store, who led me and behind her was the man who owned the general store, who led me to the den outside. With Andrew at my heels, I wondered how soon would our long walk end, when would everything end, to what or to whom was he leading me?

At last we entered the make-shift den and through the haze of smoke which came from the cigar the tall man at the desk was smoking, I saw that he was the mayor-judge. My fears were mounting as he sat watching me intently. What was this all about, was he going to put me away. Why was I brought in before him? I know that the nanny and mayor were very good friends, before he left Charlieville, at least that is what I was told. Did the nanny turn against me when she realised

that I was not coming over on her side and through her long friendship with the mayor she was sending me away, because of my refusal to go on her side? For Andrew's sake I hoped not, because he needed me to make his dreams come true. "Dear Lord please do not let me fail him, please let them wait a little while longer," I prayed.

I gripped Andrew's hand for reassurance and then whispered through my teeth, "They would not take me away from you Andrew, because I would not allow them to do so. They would not destroy your dreams as they did mine, just trust in me Andrew."

He sat looking at me the same way Miss Pete did some years before. He did not know about me, or did he? What was he thinking, what was he seeing? Was he thinking and seeing the same things that Miss Pete thought and saw that night not so long ago?

As it turned out he did not want to take Andrew away from me, but Miss Pete was going to do so. She said that she knew Andrew wanted to study law so she was sending him away since he had completed college and had done very well. But why was the mayor involved? Andrew was in Miss Pete's care, so it was all well and good for her to send him away without anyone else's consent.

I was even more certain than before, that this was one of Miss Pete's way of trying to see just if she could really break me to pieces.

Even though the mayor was once from Charlieville, I did not see then, why he should have been involved, considering that he had left so long ago to go to the city where he founded an oil company. I knew that something very weird was going on and I intended to know all about it someday soon, although I sensed that it was not going to be pleasant.

Later on, Andrew had begged me to wait on him. "Just the two of us Uncle Stephen, we would be happy together if you do decide to wait for me." He had said when I told him that I would wait for him, if he would promise me that on his return it would be just the two of us. I knew that was a very selfish thing to do, since Andrew loved the world and its people so very much. Yet, he was willing to turn away from them for my sake.

I wondered then, if I should turn away from Miss Pete and go to the nanny, but then I remembered how I had promised to show the peasants that Miss Pete was not bad. "I broke my promises too many

times, but this one I am going to keep." I had shouted to papa. Poor papa, why couldn't I make a promise for him too, maybe then he was not going to be locked up behind the iron bars, shut away from his people. Why wouldn't I make a promise to always stay at his side, the night when mama ran out from under the tent or even when I noticed that we were drifting apart, why couldn't I make the same promise that I made for Miss Pete to him?

Many times I tried to reassure myself that papa's being locked up was not my fault, but then mama's words of long ago on her death bed, would come rushing back to me: "I hate you Stephen, what did I do wrong to have a cross like you to bear? Because of you, I am dying, because of you I couldn't be free," she gasped, then died. Then the nanny's voice would remind me: "Go to your papa Stephen, he needs you," and then Miss Pete's, "You killed your mother Stephen, she was dying a slow death for twenty years."

Miss Pete turned away from me, when she decided to take Andrew away from me and then I knew that I was going to break my promise once again. Would I go on making promises only to break them and destroy the person for whom I had made the promise? Would I destroy the person's chances for survival and happiness by not doing what I knew would bring them those things? Would I destroy Andrew's chance for happiness also? Andrew had no one but me, and like me, he had no need or no feeling to go on living until I encouraged him on. I did so, because he had real dreams whilst I had only fantasies. Then too, he would avenge those who had condemned me. Yes, those hard cold eyed strangers who knew me not, but followed too, in condemning me. And also those who scorned and hated Mary and her people. I was counting on Andrew to make our village become as pure as it once used to be. My hopes were high as I watched the same train which brought the mayor-judge into Charlieville taking my strength, Andrew, away from me and carrying him to a strange world that I would never dare venture to.

Chapter 4

With Andrew gone, I had to look for something to do to occupy my time, but work was not easy to obtain, because as I wearily trudged from factory to factory, I was told the same thing: "No vacancies sir." But the employers were lying. Factories were growing rapidly and they needed help more than anything, since the 'diehard' peasants had refused to work in them. Their garden equipments were taken away, they were forced off the fields they treasured but yet they sat idle. Many were starving but yet they held on. Maybe that was because the nanny was not completely beaten. She was a strong little woman whom the devoted peasants needed. Why couldn't I be like one of them? Maybe my mama was justified in hating me, and Miss Pete in saying that I destroy people. Maybe too, if papa was outside the city, folks might not have been able to disrupt the peasants in their dormant life. How those people were suffering!

On many occasion I would walk about the village, when the news had been circulated that some fields were to be cleared. I would watch the peasants who were once the proud owner of that particular field as he would stand at the side and watch his field being destroyed. Many times they would cry out at each dishevelment of the earth, as their pride and joy were being shoveled inside out, only to be cemented to start the tall monstrous buildings which were called factories.

Most of them in all their agony would throw themselves in the tractors way, kneading the rich fertile soil which their forefathers had helped to become that way. There would always be fear or pity in the tractor driver's eyes as he would stop his vehicle just in time, or maybe a little to late. Pity for the peasants because he knew that they love the land and also because some of them had made it their only need to live.

And the nanny would always be there saying comforting things to those who were gnashing their teeth and pulling at the very roots of their hair in agony and anguish. But it never did help because she was feeling the same way. Oh yes, she felt it too, and then it became as though one blind was being led by another and how could that be?

As I ended my day's search for work, I sighed heavily and recalled everyone of the employers face whom I encountered. They expressed the same thing — pity! They needed me but yet they would not employ me because they were afraid. Afraid that the lunatic might

crack up and destroy their building. But I was determined to get a job in order to survive. Each and everyone of the residents of Charlieville was against me for different reasons. No one cared about me, so whom could I have turned to for help? The city folks did not need me nor did they seem to care if and how I existed, except when I made it known to them that I existed by way of being a nuisance to myself. I couldn't turn to the truly devoted peasants because they were too busy tending to the few fields which were left to them by the city folks because they did not need them.

The fight between the city folks and the peasants were already wearing thin. The changes were being gradually accepted by all because there were no other alternatives. Even the nanny had given up the fight, although she was still very bitter. Even the fight between the nanny and Miss Pete appeared to be settled. Neither of them seem to want me on their side again. After all it was then firmly accepted that I was the village's lunatic. And then too, I had made up my mind that I was never ever going to return to Miss Pete's house. To most of the true peasants I was just another obstacle and also a disgusting figure because when they saw me, they would see mama's and Papa's unhappiness. And I know that pity and sympathy would flow from their already heavy hearts for those two helpless people. Then hate or even worse, disgust, would flow from their hearts for me.

I had turned away from Miss Pete, so I could not ask her for help anymore. She too, had turned away from the peasants and moved over to the side where the city folks lived. "Come with us Stephen," she had begged of me. "You do not really belong here, there is nothing here for the both of us, there never was and never will be, because this side of the village is cursed." But I refused. "Here is where our people are, there will never be happiness on that side because we will be regarded as intruders," I told her. "I will never forget this day Stephen!" she shouted and got into the truck. Yes, Miss Pete left amongst all the curses and insults that the peasants hurled at her. Then Uncle Harold drove away, dragging an old peasant beneath the truck. More curses were hurled their way as some of the peasants went to pick up the unfortunate man.

But I did not go, I turned away from my people and made my way back to the hill where I could have looked down at the land,

where my papa's and the villagers pride once lay. Some of the fields were parched, never to regain their fertility. I saw that the tractors were turning the fields into big soggy mounds. And with each turn I was hurt and I cried. I cried for papa and the rest of the peasants because their only need of life was taken away from them. Their joys and even their sorrows were in the fields. Even their children's future were supposed to be in the fields. At least that is the way the parents had planned it. To the peasant parents it seemed as death itself, only they were not dead or even dying. They were being made to live with some wicked purpose maybe to be tormented and hurt even to the point of exasperation.

They used to stand at the side and watch in agony whilst their young plants were being crushed with all the savage fury of the tractors wheels. Or if not they would touch them, then in turn, they would kiss the soil and with glazed tear-filled eyes they would converse with someone up there. Maybe it would be to their ancestors or maybe it would be to the maker of the world, thanking him for giving them happy days in the fields.

But soon or even too soon the praying would have to be stopped because the tractors drivers were always busy. Then with tears streaming down their cheeks they would run out of the fields with a handful of the rich fertile soil. I know that they tried very hard not to look back, but because of their love for the fields they would do so. Then they would run out, maybe to seek a place of happiness.

I had to get away from it all, I had to get to my hill. I went there but found that it did not belong to me anymore. I saw children playing there. They were the children of the city folks. I had to stop them, I had to stop their amused laughter — they had no right being on my hill! It was mine, it belonged to me. They could not take that away from me too. I could not stand to lose that after so many other things I have lost. Things which I had thought were mine and claimed as mine were taken away from me. But this I could not lose without putting up a fight!

With flailing arms I rushed at them, but they were sprightly little children so they dodged me with little or no difficulty. At last they were making fun of the lunatic as their parents had done. I was in their

way claiming as mine just what they wanted. But I could not let them have it because that hill belonged to Andrew and me.

My head — it was getting heavy — it did not seem to be clear at all! I had to stop them, that is why I again made my next move. I picked up the piece of wood which was lying on the ground and swung away!

But then the piercing screams of the city folks boys brought me to the realisation of what I had done. Did I kill one of Andrew's love. How will he judge me? On my knees I cried out, "please do not be angry with me Andrew, you know that I had to stop them because they were taking what belongs to us." Between my sobs I added saying, "I had to do this because they wanted to destroy our relationship. Yes, that is what they are doing slowly but surely, they are tearing us apart."

"Can you remember the very first time that you came into the village? You were scared then, scared of this big, ugly, cruel world. Yes, this is what this world is all about — ugliness and cruelty. But then when you began to know me better you thought that there was still people around who was capable of sharing love. But they did not leave us alone. They had to show you that love is not real, they made you aware that there is no more anything called love — that people fabricate love, when ever they want to escape from reality. And then you began to change, you saw just what they were doing to me, you saw how the city folks and Miss Pete were trying to destroy me and instead of hating them for doing this to me, you said that you could not because — you love them. But that is not so Andrew, there is no love in this world, it all vanished away when my mama and your parents died. You lied Andrew, there is no love! no love! do you hear me? Why couldn't you hate Miss Pete and the city folks also? Many times I tried to stop them, but at each try I became more unsuccessful and they grew stronger and stronger. Now Andrew, this incident here is the last straw and I hope that you will see just why I tried to stop them, they have proved that I am less than a man. Yes, they have succeeded in taking you away from me. You who I have made my reason and happiness for living. But that hill is the only reminder I have of whatever relationship there was between the both of us. They have succeeded in destroying me Andrew, but why couldn't they leave me with just that last gift? I hope you remember what fun we used to have on that hill, just how I used to enrapture you with tales from my make believe

world. "But most of all, it was on this hill you really professed to me how frightened you were being utterly alone. You helped to heighten my fears of what loneliness is really about. Yes, it was you who made me aware of what loneliness is all about. I really love you Andrew, but cannot have you because they do not want us to be together. Why couldn't they leave me with the one reminder that I had of you? Andrew, now I hope that you will understand just why I had to do this. Andrew please do not be angry with me."

Strangely Miss Pete's voice came back to me — haunting me: There was once a boy like you whom everybody loved, yet he killed two little girls and had to be put away. If I had Miss Pete to see after me I was sure that she was not going to let them put me away. But then I was alone and also scared stiff. It was different with that boy because everybody loved him. But me? They just pitied me and oh how I hated them for doing so.

As I looked down the hill I saw the parents of the boys whom I had chased off the hill. The nanny and her followers were there too, but in the back of the city folks as they had to be. The city folks came up to me, pointing accusing fingers at me. Yes, they had brought strangers to lock me up.

Once again I was nearing the entrance of the sanitarium, and also complete destruction. But I could not be destroyed because Andrew was there somewhere in the far away city, waiting on time until he would be free to come and set the peasants free of the city folks clutches. I was looking for a chance to escape, but the city folks must have sensed my plan of escape, for I was pushed roughly towards the steps. Again I received the sympathetic glances of the bystanders and my eyes pleaded with them to set me free, but no one read the message in my eyes. Was this my last, was this the last day that I was supposed to enjoy my so-called freedom, was it going to be terminated before my wanting it to be so. Well then, I was never free. Then why did they leave me to go on with foolish dreams and inspirations, why were they ending it now when I had just one wish in my heart and that was for Andrew's sudden re-entry into Charlieville bringing with him a new life for the fields which were no more. New life for the peasants who had buried themselves with uncountable sorrows.

Bringing new life for the peasants who were living with these idle dreams, that one day their children would be given back to them and then when all these things were done their ancestors would be able to lie at peace in their everlasting slumber. (Oh no! those were my idle thoughts again). But for me I wanted none of those things except for my life, my love one to be at my side once again. Yes, no mama or papa because those two people meant nothing to me any more. All that I wanted was for Andrew to be at my side once again.

Were I going to fail Andrew as I failed so many people before? Andrew was depending on me. He was even turning away from the people he loved and from the world for my sake. Love for the world, for the things in it and for its people, were Andrew's only reason for wanting to live at a time, until he met and learned to love me, or was it pity? Yes, those were his only reasons for wanting to live until he agreed to the raw deal which I handed out to him and that was for him to turn away from the world he loved and turn completely to me, and he did. Could I have failed him then? No! I could not, that is why I again made my next move — I ran! I was not going to run away to the hill since it did not belong to me anymore. Neither was I going to run away to the house that papa had built for us. Although it was strong it offered little protection for me. I was strong enough to push papa out of his house to behind the iron bars of the sanitarium. Maybe there was somebody strong enough to push the house down around me!

All that papa could have done from behind the iron bars of his cell was to look down at the busy street below, hearing about his people's troubles and woes and not being able to soothe them. Then calling our occasionally to the peasants to forgive him. Shouting out to the attendants as they pass by to set him free, so that he in turn will be able to set his people free from the city folks. But all that they would do about it was to offer him pitying glances or ignore him completely. And most of all he would feel very sad when he heard the people's shouts and laughter in the street and not be able to share in them. Oh why was I such a monster what could my roses which I kept on sending him do to help him? Surely they could not give him peace of mind, since the only peace of mind he could have gotten was, when he was free of the iron bars of the sanitarium.

As I ran, I saw the bewildered stares of the bystanders but I did not care about what they thought at the moment. I was leaving Charlie-

ville and going to those places where no one, knew me. Yes, I intended leaving all my unhappiness behind me!

"Sonny, Sonny wait!" The nanny always chilling, commanding voice stopped me. But that time it held a note of excitement as she said, "Sonny there is no need for you to runaway, because the boy is not dead, he will live and you are free to go." As I looked across I saw the mayor hurrying behind the nanny. She smiled a very big smile which covered her wrinkled face. She used to smile a lot but that was before the intrusion of the city folks into Charlieville and also before papa's being locked up. Then she was very grieved and sad, so there was no room for smiles, because then she had to go it alone and that was very hard on her, since most of the peasants had already adjusted themselves to the new life which the city folks had introduced to Charlieville and they were loving it that way.

"Stephen we did it, we won her — at least half way, but we could win her if only really want us to Sonny. Yes Sonny we could win her," she said wistfully. But I was not sharing in her moment of triumphant glory. I was sobbing deeply because I came near to breaking the last promise that I could ever or would ever make. Oh yes, I came near of breaking the promise that I had made to Andrew by attempting to run out on him.

"Do not listen to them Stephen, because I really tried to set you free also, I really did try," Miss Pete said in a small voice. Why don't you just give up because you know that you have lost again. You are an evil woman and the peasants of Charlieville will see to it that you are destroyed as you should have been done long ago!" the nanny shouted to Miss Pete. "Sonny one day your mama and papa will be able to rest in peace when this evil woman has been put away. Yes, one day soon they will be able to get the peace which they so richly deserve," she shouted out and then departed.

"They want to take you away from me Stephen, but I would not let them do it," Miss Pete vowed fervently. "Don't they know that it will always be you, Andrew and me? Don't they know that it will always be like this because this is the way we want it?"

I watched her as she left and wondered, would there always be sadness in our village? When and how would it end? I know that I could have helped her and the nanny — I could have ended their sadness. But

then there was only one solution — death to the entire village. But how could it be done?

I watched Miss Pete as she turned out of the sanitarium grounds. Yes, I could have ended her sadness but then Miss Pete had left us to go on the other side where she had said there would be happiness for her. She did not need the other peasants. The nanny was still wanted because the other peasants needed her. With her and the man who owned the general store, they always found comfort and happiness. Yes, I knew that the nanny would never find happiness but yet I could not have taken her away from the peasants neither could I have taken all of them.

Chapter 5

I had a regular job in the mayor's office for the past two months. My job there was to stack his huge books on the shelves. "Sort of book keeping Stephen," he had said with a wide grin. I laughed out aloud and he joined me too, but then turned grim faced once more. He walked over my way and joined me with the books. He just stood there toying around with the books in his hands like he always did when wanting to say something but not knowing just how to start. I turned around to face him and asked anxiously, "what did I do wrong this time?" He then looked at me with an astonished look on his face and asked with a somewhat shaky laugh, "why did you ask me that son?" "The book you are fiddling around with it," I said. "Do you always go around observing people's little traits Stephen?" he asked me seriously. "Tell me what I did wrong!" I shouted at him. "As a matter of fact you did everything right so now I am giving you a holiday!" he said brightly. "Are you still trying to get me out of the village?" I asked angrily. "You must not think that way Stephen. Look, I have given you a job, but I really do think that you deserve a holiday." He said in a hurt voice.

That job was all that I could have gotten and I believe that it was through the nanny's influence, since it was made known that I could not do anything to earn my keep. I watched the factories growing rapidly and changing the face of Charlieville so that it might not be recognized by anyone who has been away for a very long time.

To the staunch earth loving peasants as the nanny and her followers, what was happening to their fields seemed like death itself. They felt lost because they were forced into a kind of life they did not desire. When my forefathers had started off in building Charlieville, with the help of the other families, there were not many people, but over the years the numbers have accumulated considerably — many of which are the city folks off spring.

I used to watch those people, not understanding their ways of living, yet hating them. How I missed seeing a peasant wife smiling face or even seeing a peasant husband wrinkled face, as he would stop in the middle of his chores in the fields to discuss the forthcoming harvest or to seek advice from the always chewing tobacco owner, of the general store. Or even hearing a wife's happy singing voice as she would go about her business of preparing the dinner for her hard

working husband, for whenever he should come home, yes, to their home, tired from a hard day's work in the fields, yet loving every minute of it.

I missed too, seeing a young boy and girl strolling under the star studded sky talking and planning when she would have to stay at home to see after his children and prepare his dinner whilst he would be coming home, yes to their home wearily dragging a sack of corn or cocoa pods behind him. Then they would laugh together or even sigh together and leave the stars to twinkle knowingly at each other and the moon to guide them out, making their path bright until they should depart with new promises for a better and brighter tomorrow, when he would once show the light, give brightness to the children of the soil.

But those happy days were there no more, those days were gone just like the stars that used to twinkle knowingly at each other, like the moon that used to make the path bright for the fresh innocent young lovers. Suddenly Charleville woke up and found that those days were to be no more, as soon as the city folks made their entry. The children found that those nights were gone too, that there were no twinkling stars, or no bright moon for them to make their future plans under. Some of the children still found that there were magic in the moonlight, in the stars and in the night, so they followed through with their future plans. There are some too, who were corrupted by the city folks evil ways of life so they are saying they have children but their teenaged ones are getting back at them by having to be hauled out of the clubs and spending their nights in jails. Most of those children are being sent to juvenile schools and it does not even seem to bother their parents.

Take Bob and Julie, for instance, they were my school mates and also two of the many who used to walk under the star studded skies and plan their future. Bob about his tending to his fields, and carrying his abundant harvest to the market, and Julie about her staying at home to do the household chores and wipe their children's snooty noses.

But soon the city folks came and took away their dreams just as they did their parents fields. Bob and Julie still had those children, but their two children came to no good. Eighteen year old Cindy

their daughter committed suicide when she discovered that she was pregnant and was going to be an unwed mother. Then twenty year old Nicky their son, was knifed down and then thrown into an empty field whilst his parents were living it up somewhere, at a week-end convention. Yes, those days that I knew off were there no more.

Even the negroes who were once given the jobs the peasants had refused, were not there anymore, because the very peasants who had kicked up a storm when the city folks were building those factories were now share-holders in them, or if not they were the owners of successful businesses.

There were no more, thatched roof houses in the middle of the village, but they were to be found at the foot of the hills and in those houses, the nanny and her faithful followers abode in solitude, tending to the few fields which hardly gave Charlieville her market produce. Even the mayor had retired to live with the nanny and her followers in solitude.

I used to watch in anger, because the negroes whether they were educated or not were given the most menial task to do. How those people were hurt and bitten. It was only then that I understood Mary and the invisible tears she shared for the very young negroes of Charlieville, and those that were not yet born. What were their future to be? Hadn't they the same rights as the city folks, didn't they help to industrialise the village? Maybe their only moment of happiness were when they were gathered together in their homes or even in one of their many churches on the hills, still singing about how soon they would be free, free in their second living beyond those dark foreboding skies.

I pitied those people living with foolish hopes and believing in their foolish dreams that one day they would be free. It has been a long time since the first batch of negroes arrived in Charlieville as if they were running away from an epidemic that was attacking them in all the different towns and villages in which they had been. Then when the city folks arrived the same thing happened. Many left and many arrived, not knowing about the city folks. But as I knew, it would never be long before they would push on again still seeking a place of happiness. They would leave and with them would be their little children who would beg that they should stay to finish their schooling. Maybe

the reason behind their begging would be that they were tired of trying to get adjusted to the new schools each time or making new friends.

But the parents would often be relieved for often times they would hear their young ones cry out saying, "mama we would like to go to the zoo because the other children say that the lions attendant give them free sweets and popcorn. Or mama we will like to go in the park. Mama why can't we go too?" Then their mama's eyes would be filled with bitter tears as she would turn away and say, "Some day soon you are going to have those things and if you don't get them here, it should not matter much to you — now go to the church and pray for that day." How could any one of those mothers tell their young ones that they could not enjoy those things because of their so-called ugly coloured skins?

"For some of my people, Charlieville is their sixth stop, but this is my third and I am not going to run anymore." Mary's voice comes back to me. She said so and she stayed to help her people by being a pastor in one of their many churches on the hills. She was now grown into a plump woman and a very beautiful woman at that.

A long time ago when Charlieville was not yet an industrial village the mayor had said to me: "Stephen why don't you go away from here, go any where, forget that you ever knew a place called Charlieville. You are not happy here, in fact, you never have been. Hear me and get out before it is too late — I will be willing to finance your trip." Then he must have seen my face darkening for he said, "Stephen this village has nothing for you, here you will only meet misery. Do you have anything here that can make you happy? Go to the outside world and forget that you ever knew Charlieville. Yes go anywhere you think you might find some happiness in order to make a new start."

True, I had nothing in Charlieville to make me happy, but Andrew was there some where in the city and soon would be returning and bring with him happiness or so I had thought. The Mayor had said that I should make a new start in the city and he also said that there were friendly faces out there, yet Mary and her people had come way out in Charlieville to hide. They were not happy in the village, they were being pushed right out, once again. I wonder just where were they supposed to go, just where is their rightful place, yes, where do they want them to go? If Mary and her people couldn't find happiness out there, neither would me, the self confirmed lunatic. But I was protected

there in Charleville in the house which papa had built for us with his very own hands.

Oh yes, I knew that I must never dare venture to the outside world, because I was sure to be afraid of the unpleasantness that would confront me. I got up and slammed the door shut behind me — the mayor will understand, I hoped.

"Stephen I will like to speak to you for a while." I was about to push on again but her voice got to me when she pleaded, "please Stephen." I looked at the woman who was once the Miss Pete I knew. There were lines of an aged person on her face. Her hair had become grey, even greyer than the nanny's who was a great deal older than her, and her face was of a sallow complexion. She was never happy on that side and then too, uncle Harold had divorced her. Was this the way it was always going to be for Miss Pete, the so-called evil woman? What was she seeking, what did she really want? I can't ever really recall a time when she was happy in the village or appeared to be, because before the great influx of the city folks into our village, she was busy fighting the nanny, papa and the rest of the peasants. Then with the arrival of the city folks she began to fight very hard to find a place with them.

My heart ached for the Miss Pete whom I once knew. I wanted to tell her to come back to the side she really belongs to, that the old peasants had accepted Charleville for what it had become, because they could not win. Also I wanted to let her know that there were no longer any need to fight with the nanny. Yes, I wanted to tell her all those things but could not, because I was there to destroy! Maybe all that was needed for Miss Pete to come back were just those few words but I refused to say them. Once again my silent tongue was destroying someone else.

"Stephen I need you, please come," Miss Pete begged desperately. "As everyone knows, Uncle Harold has divorced me, but what they do not know is that my life with him was pure hell!" I chuckled inwardly because we all knew that it was the other way around. "You know that it is no use Miss Pete — I am sorry but we cannot make it." I said contritely. She looked at me with narrowing eyes and questioned, "Stephen is Andrew your reason? I shook my head, telling her yes. "Well Stephen, he is still depending on me to pay his law fees, so if you want him, you

will have to come over to get him," she said nastily. I looked at the woman whom my heart swelled with pity for not so long before.

Her face was a mask of hate. Although I still felt pity for the woman who was no more, I hated her for threatening to take Andrew away from me. Her face sobered and then she said, "Stephen nobody has asked me to come back, they ran me out from where I really belong." "Stephen boy, this is your chance." I told myself. "Yes, tell her that the peasants need and want her." But I could not. Then too, Miss Pete did not want to belong to the peasants.

I was in the middle of a big controversy, or rather I was it. The nanny, the mayor and the man who owned the general store wanted me on one side and Miss Pete wanted me on the next. I wondered then, just why and what for, would any of the respective parties succeed in getting me on their side? I watched her as she walked away — her heart was twisted with hate. Hate for the peasants because they robbed her of becoming like the city folks when she really wanted to do so. They robbed her by not changing their ways of living and adjusting theirs to those of the city folks. The hate was still there and it was no use since with her age the time for socialising with the city folks was long gone.

Although they never regained their fields and the upkeep of Charlieville no longer depended on the market produce of the fields, the the peasants worked side by side and the few fields that they had managed to salvage, flourished but only to rot, because the city folks refused to buy in the market place. But then the new mayor really put his foot down and ordered the city folks and even some of the peasants who at one time depended on the fields of Charlieville as a means of their livelihood, to buy the things which were grown in the fields of Charlieville.

Many times I would walk in the market place and see the peasants sitting idly by, whilst their produce lay rotting on the wet dirty floor. Then, I would cry for papa and the other peasants because their fields were forcefully taken away. The fields which their forefathers had prepared for them. Papa and the nanny were the leaders of Charlieville, but then I had locked him away from the evil world, so then the nanny was all alone and everything was going wrong. By locking papa away from the evil world, (as I tried to make yourself believe that I did) I also locked him away from his people. I was told that papa was going to die on many occasions but yet he was still languishing in the sanitarium.

Then once again as I walk through the market place, there were hardly any regrets in my heart because the city folks were buying their market produce in Charlieville. It was also made plain to the city folks that once they were residing in Charlieville, they were not to be regarded as the city folks. This brought indignation on both sides because the city folks were always going to regard them as the 'peasants', with much scorn.

Once on one of my usual walks through the market place, I moved from stall to stall, looking at the people who once had the whole village to themselves. Many were old and hardly recognised me or maybe they were too busy recollection the time when the village belonged to them. Or remembering their rich fertile fields now covered with factories. Remembering too, how they had promised their children that the fields were going to be left to them, as it was the custom through out Charlieville's short history. But now, now there is nothing! Anyway the children had forgotten those promises, or were not thinking about them any longer. They also forgot that they were told to fight for what belonged to them, but they did not. They left the fields which were once handed down through the generation as an heir-loom. Their reason was, that it was no use fighting a battle which they could not win. But did they try? Yes the city folks won the peasants by winning over their children. How could they the children be that weak? Nearly two generations of Charlieville were the offsprings of peasants. How could they let just a few neon bulbs, fast cars and city talk, change them from being devoted peasant children to immoral pageants, what really went wrong with them? Didn't the peasant parents noticed that they were losing their children, did it happen that sudden?

Once again the nanny and her followers had been defeated, because the city folks had won their children from them. Maybe from the beginning the peasants children had not like toiling in the fields, but were doing so because their parents were expecting it of them. Maybe too, the city folks were just their ideal excuse of getting away from something that they wanted to for a very long time. But me, I made nothing my excuse but simply refused to work in the fields any by doing so, I gave papa a wound in his heart which I am sure that time would never heal, just as it would never heal mine.

Soon the old timers will be there no more, they will leave behind them a life they loved, maybe because their parents had loved it and also because it was the only kind of life they were accustomed to although some of them genuinely loved the fields. A reality was coming to an end.

'General store' that was the sign written on the half fallen building. Inside the store was dusty just as the outside and the merchandise had grime on them and that showed that business was bad. A thin old man was seated on an arm chair. I could not see his face, because the newspaper he was reading was covering his face.

"Good morning, where is the owner?" I inquired after him. "I am the owner," he informed me laying the newspaper on the floor, and at the same time getting up somewhat feebly. I looked into his puzzled eyes. They were still fierce looking although he had aged considerably from the last time I saw him. He must have seen the pity in my eyes so he said, "Stephen we tried, yes we really tried to leave the fields to you our sons and daughters but the city folks defeated us. Sorry that we could not leave them for you, we really are!" I wonder how long was this supposed to go on? he said mostly to himself. "What?" I inquired of him. "The carrying on of the fields Stephen!" He cried out angrily. He was angry because he thought that I was not alert, that I was not sharing in their misery. But I was, I even felt pity for them. Yet I could not understand just why they were still grieved and why they were still feeling it after so many years had been passed. Then he went on to explain, "Stephen, my father was given those fields by his father and his father by his — my great grand father!" he cried out proudly. But then he added despairingly. "Now it is ending Stephen, something which maybe had to go on forever is ending, in this cruel way."

I left him then cursing himself and the city folks for ending something which maybe, had to go on forever and also for failing his ancestors miserably. I wondered then, how long had he to live because I did not know his name nor the nanny's. "I have to ask their names but not just yet." I told myself and then quietly stole out of the store. As I reached out into the road, I looked back and whispered: "The man who owns the general store."

The streets of Charlieville were no longer deserted. "Hey mister get out of my way!" I missed coming in contact with the cyclist and as he passed me he said grinning to his gloating friend. "It is only the lunatic, we should have ridden him over." Yes to them, I was only the lunatic.

I missed seeing the dirt track and the hens quickly getting across the road, when ever the lorry which used to take the produce to the market was passing. I missed too, seeing the tumble down shacks with the snooty nosed children standing by the front door. Now in their places were tall buildings caged in with mesh wire.

Yes indeed the nanny and her followers had nothing to look back on, since their whole life time of hard work was now back into the earth. They really tried to keep what was theirs but the city folks came and took them and with the fields they took about a hundred devoted peasants need for living. What is the names of those strangers whom I have been living around all my life, the nanny, the man who owned the general store and the newly added mayor, just who are they?

Chapter 6

The night of Miss Pete's second wedding celebrations, I was there on the hill which I once claimed as mine. I drew my coat around me because it was bitterly cold. The wild city music came floating up to me, and I blocked my ears with the end of my coat, but yet I could not block out the sounds of the bongo drums and bass guitars. Nor could I shut my eyes to the things that I saw going on around me and did not like. As the peasants who could not stand the sudden change of the village at one time it was too much for me yet I could not run away. Most of the peasants saw that the change was good — they even encouraged it by helping to build the factories and modern schools. Why couldn't the nanny and her followers accept them?

Miss Pete was now married to a very successful doctor from the city. Plainly, that was her last vain effort to get in with the city folks just as the other peasants who thought that they were wholly accepted because they were allowed to go to the same schools and even attended the same social functions. Although they were freely integrating the barrier was still there — they were still regarded as the 'peasants'.

The moonlight brightened up the village and the wild city music disturbed what was at first a quiet night. I looked up into the heavens — the stars felt different then, and I felt mama's presence so I said: "Mama please do not be angry with papa or the other peasants because they have tried, they really tried. Papa could not help them as you would have wanted him to do because I locked him away from the evil world. Mama please do not cry, mama really! Don't you know that you have no right to be looking down on this evil world? Papa is on his way up — he is coming to meet you and then there will be no need for tears. Mama please do not cry!"

I saw the candle light twinkling sadly on the peasants windows. I smiled to myself and I felt good for the big happy glow I felt inside, because the old peasants had still clung to their old way of life, although they were offered, all the necessities of modern living. Maybe the city folks did so because the shacks were becoming an eyesore to 'their' new Charlieville. And way out on the hills the shacks were clustered together, as if they were to be separated they might fall. And in those shacks, negro spirituals were being sung as usual. They were singing about the faraway kingdom where they will soon be. The kingdom where they would find the happiness that they have been seeking for

on this earth knowing that they would never find it. Then I knew that mama is there and joined in the singing.

Yes how happy they were snuggled together in their shacks. Again I recall Mary's moods concerning her people. "Stephen for some of my people, Charlieville is their sixth stop, but for me this is my third and I am not going to run any more. I am going to stay here and live with their hateful stares and dirty remarks. "Then I tried to convince her that it was only some of the city folks who treated them that way and she said ' True Stephen, and do you know why we are not treated so by the peasants? Well are, the reasons are that the old ones are too busy feeling sorry for themselves, and the younger ones? They are still trying to really get in with the city folks. Do not get me wrong Stephen, they do mix with them, but they are not comfortable remembering that their mothers and grandmothers were what the city folks hated — They were the people of the soil! I think that it is time that someone should wake them up from their stupor and shout hey look the negroes are around!"

Poor Mary, she was still grieved by her brother Ted's death. She loved him, but he did not love her in return or any other negro for that matter. He killed himself as he stated in his suicide note because he wanted to be free just like the city folks but he knew that he never would be. I expected him to do so sooner and I guess so to did Mary and any other person who was interested in enough to care about him. I used to watch as he would wander aimlessly along with that great big chip on his shoulders. I know that many a young negro boy and girl wanted to be his friend because he was so full of life, although he suffused it with the cold and hard personality he had suddenly adopted.

Sometimes he would be seen with the city folks boys — the rebellious ones. And anyone could have seen that he was not happy with them, but yet he stayed and was accepted, until that night It was the night when Charlieville's first theatre was to be opened and the whole village was taken up with the excitement. Miss Pete was there because the city folks were going to pay tribute to her in a small way. Maybe because she was the only one who did not put up a fight when the city folks had taken over the village-in-fact she welcomed it. At last she was going to be happy now that she was made supervisor to one of the biggest school in the village. Even the nanny and the man

who owned the general store were invited. They were supposed to represent the die — hard peasants. Ted who was considered leader of the 'rebellions' (that was the name they had adopted for themselves) had to lead them in robbing a grocery store. After they had successfully gained entrance to the store they opened the safe and on finding that there was no money therein, they burnt the building.

Soon they were caught — a bunch of frightened little boys. In his cell, the news got to Ted that he was to be held responsible for the robbery and the fire. But that was too much for his already heavy shoulders. He also heard that Mary and the nanny were collecting money for his lawyer's fee. He did not want it that way or any other way. He was tired of people his people begging for everything that they wanted. After seeing the light, he did not want to live any longer, he did not want to have to remember just what fools he had made out of his people. He knew that it was useless. What was going to be the outcome if Mary and the nanny had failed to collect the required sum? Even if they had succeeded what was going to be the outcome of the trial? Surely the truth was not going to be known by the villagers. He was given the leadership of the gang because he was a boy full of anger and hate which made him daring and also because of his two powerful fists. And along with the title of being their leader he also became their slave and scapegoat. Then in his cell, he saw that there was little or no chance of his ever being free from his superiors, the city folks. He saw that there was little or no chance of his ever getting or owning anything with no strings attached. He saw that he was forever going to be on the outside looking in and he wanted to be on the inside too, if and whenever he chose. But then when he saw that it was always going to be the way he did not want, he took the only way he knew out. He took his life, i.e. hanged himself with the clothes from his uncomfortable cell bed. Yes, there was always something around with which the negro could end his life, but nothing, never anything for him to begin or continue it.

Ted took his life the way in which most negroes take theirs when they find that there is no way out, when they find that they are living a life which is theirs because it was given to them with certain limitations and could be cut off by certain people when ever it pleased them.

At the funeral. Mary was a picture of sorrow and misery — she was afraid for her brother because she was certain that he was not going to enjoy the life which most negroes prepare for all through their life time. Never-the-less she still prayed for him.

The last time there was a marriage feast in the village, (one like Miss Pete's). Andrew was there on the hill with me and we were happy. I wanted to relive that night but did not because I knew that Andrew would not like it." Never relive past memories, uncle Stephen, whether they are happy or sad. "Andrew would always advise me. Once too, he had begged of me, "do not leave me with Miss Pete, uncle Stephen because with her, I will be all alone. She does not care to talk with me or any one else. I even get the strange feeling sometimes that she is sick, very sick. She gets that faraway look in her eyes and she cries at night. She is terribly afraid uncle Stephen, yes she is sad and afraid of something.

But then I accused Andrew of being sentimental, so with an embarrassed grin, he, shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the conversation with an unconvincing maybe. Then I assured him that I would never leave him alone with Miss Pete and I did not tell him then, just what my reasons were for sticking close to him. Then later on it did not matter because I grew to love him very much.

It had been twenty five years since mama left us and twenty three for papa's detention in the sanitarium. Poor papa since the day that I ran out of the sanitarium grounds, I never went back inside to see him, yet I kept on sending him the roses by the nanny. Andrew had asked and even begged me to wait on him and I had promised that I would do so, then too, I was afraid that the gates were going to shut me in never to open again.

At the age of twenty-one Andrew came to Charleville on vacation but he did not come to me. Instead he went to Miss Pete's but visited me regularly. I never again believed in my foolish dreams that one day he was going to come into the village, chasing away the negroes and the city folks to the places where they really belong to, nor did I still believe in or wanted him to give back the fields to the peasants since there were hardly any around who wished to be considered as being a 'peasant'. Then too, how could that be when the factories were now giving so many people their daily bread? I know now, that when I wanted those things to be fulfilled, I was only thinking about a hundred or a little more people's happiness. Now most of them are too old to tend to their fields or they are very near to

retiring to the second living. Maybe if the city folks had not entered into the village to start their 'project of progress' as they termed it, we the peasants children would have continued to work in the fields because there was going to be nothing else for us to do.

"Sonny please do not fail your papa, Miss Pete is trying to destroy you then your papa will be crushed completely and she knows that. Please do not give her the chance sonny, your papa still asks that you should come to visit him, he has not got very long to live, go and do so before it is too late." The nanny often pleaded with me. Papa was already crushed when I refused to help him to tend to the fields he had hoped to leave for me someday. Then he was completely crushed when I ran out from the hospital grounds and in so doing failed to prove to him that he had produced a man.

In a year's time Andrew was again coming into Charleville. This time he was doing so permanently, now that he had passed his final exams and graduated with a successful stint of law practice behind him which he had acquired in the city. How must I greet a man whom I really knew at the age of sixteen? I was afraid that he might not need me, that the big city had hardened him against me. "Dear Andrew please keep your part of the promise because I have kept mine all those years. You love people and you love the world but Andrew, if they change you and make you turn away from me, I will hate you and them, I swear that I will!" I said fiercely.

Chapter 7

"May he rest in peace," pastor Ryan said with a bored sigh. "May he rest in peace a voice repeated behind me. I looked around and saw Miss Pete. Her eyes caught mine and I moved quickly away from her but not before she smiled her funny little smile. The funeral was a large one because it was rumoured that the man who was being buried, had died of grief. Of course most of the villagers laughed at the rumours and said that it was his time to die and so to with any other old peasant. Who cared about a sentimental old fool if he could not face the bare facts of life and accept them for what they were? To the villagers everything had happened too many years ago, and there was hardly any evidence around with which anyone could have identified the old Charlieville, except for the nanny and her few followers and their shacks in the clean-swept yards which they refused to do away with. Yes, who cared about him even though he was a devoted peasant unto his death?

After the funeral Miss Pete came over to me and said: "Stephen, Andrew will be here in precisely five months and two weeks and you will be back too. Do you remember that a very long time ago we had promised to show them that we are a good team? Although many years have passed we are still going to show them, aren't we?" There we were, ready to wage out mini war, when all the other peasants had accepted Charlieville for what it had become. But then the fight between Miss Pete and me was not over the changing of the village, but because of Andrew and my not accepting her house as our home. But then shouldn't all this be over? Miss Pete did not need me any more since she had assumed such a high position with the city folks. I wondered then, when the 'real' war between the nanny and Miss Pete would end and why was it over me in the first place?

I was afraid of her, afraid of the skinny woman at my side, because it was said that she was crazy. In just over two years she was about to be divorced by her second husband, the doctor. She was accused of setting fire to his bed and also of stealing some of his medicine of which type was not disclosed. I was afraid of her because I did not know whether she was capable of destroying Andrew the way she destroyed papa through me.

I left the glazed, beady-eyed woman standing there at the corner cursing the nanny and the other peasants for robbing her of a perfectly

happy life with the city folks. I impulsively turned and watched her walk away, heading for a place she did not really belong to, where she could not really find happiness. Then, I swung away from the ugly figure and made my way back to the old peasants at the foothills because I knew that I would be always welcome there.

Once again I was standing at the train station. I stood there once when the mayor-judge was coming into Charlieville and then when Andrew was leaving to go on to law school. I was proud of that moment because of the importance it had in both our lives. It was also the moment of decision for him and he had chosen to go to law school. Although I was scared of being without him, I soon overcame my fears and doubts because I knew that when his schooling was over, he was going to come back to me. And that had been his first step in becoming a judge.

When he came home for his vacation some years ago, I saw that the city life had changed him. I knew then that he had changed to the extent where I hardly knew him any longer. He looked so dignified and sure of himself that I was sure he was not going to need me, that he was not going to want to be a part of this plain, old, lunatic.

On seeing the train, the people surged forward. But I did not go because after all these years of waiting for him I was still not ready to meet him. I was not ready to accept the person in place of my Andrew, the scared little boy, around whom I had woven my whole life. I stood there watching the people as they hugged and kissed each other and all at once I began to get the feeling that I did not really belong there. I wanted to run away from it all, but then it dawned on me that it was now too late after so many years of waiting. After all, was he not the reason for prolonging my useless life?

Then I saw him, he was the last to get off the train. And as I had said before the city had changed him — not only in the way he was dressed but by the way he grew his hair. The soft lost look in his eyes had disappeared and was replaced by a hard cold one. That person could not be my Andrew, and a feeling of desperation came over my whole being.

"My Andrew is coming on a later train and he will be wearing his village clothes I told myself.

Andrew had said that the building of factories on the peasants fields was progress. Was the way he dressed now, and looked progress also? He had failed me miserably. I was going to leave him standing there. Anyway he had not seen me. I turned away and began to snake my way through the crowd, and no one noticed me. They were too busy hugging and kissing their long awaited loved ones. Even though they had seen the look of desperation in my eyes, even though they had seen that the swollen seas had already begun to swallow me, what would they have cared? Nothing mattered to them, now that they had their loved ones at their sides and the world had once more materialised into a happy place to live in. Yes, who cared about the agony and pain on my face?

"Uncle Stephen, Uncle Stephen!" I heard Andrew's voice calling out to me, amidst the clamour of voices that came from the happy excited people, as he hurried to catch up with me. "Uncle Stephen!" he shouted again. I had to hurry away, I had to leave him standing there because I did not prepare myself to meet with this stranger. "Uncle Stephen!" he shouted once again, but this time his voice held an angry note to it. I stopped and looked around at him. Was it disgust that I saw written so clearly on his rugged handsome face? Maybe he saw the reason of my running away written in my eyes, for he said more calmly, "come, come now uncle Stephen, a promise is a promise once it was made by me." I made a feeble attempt to smile but decided against it because I knew that he was going to see through it. Suddenly he burst out with a hearty laugh which startled and annoyed me at the same time. Was I that comical looking? Oh hell! I did not even know whether he was laughing at me or not.

Once again I began to make quick retreating steps. "Uncle Stephen please do not run away from me, because I have not failed you. See, look I have come back to you. We made a promise to each other and nothing is going to change that. I have changed a great deal, you have changed some, but you must not be afraid uncle Stephen, because changes are good. You must face reality." I hated him then for trying to explain everything in detail as though I was a small child. Could it be that Andrew believe that I am a lunatic? True, I never doubted it anymore, but I could not have faced it if Andrew believed that of me.

Yes, Andrew had promised that he would come back to me and he did. Was me merely fulfilling his duties to me and hating himself for making such a rash promise? Why would this fine young man who was now one of the most successful lawyers in the city come back to me, the lunatic?

"But Andrew, the way that you are dressed doesn't seem right! You have now become like one of the city folks. You are a stranger. Andrew, I don't feel the same way about you and I am sure that you are feeling the change too, Andrew tell me, you are one of those men who know about truths, please tell me the truth, do you think that we did a wise thing by agreeing to let you go into the city? You are not answering Andrew, you are afraid that we did not think right! What am I to do, just what have they done to you?" "Uncle Stephen, I am dressed differently and even speak differently but what I was, I still am," he said slowly in that explanatory way he had now adopted when speaking to me. Yes he was still Andrew, yet, I was not sure of him anymore. "I am sorry Andrew," I said tiredly.

Surely, he could not know that I was about to run away from him, but yet he knew. Was this the way it was always going to be? Were I to be always uncomfortable in this professional monster's presence? No, I could not deny to him that I was not about to run away from him as I was sure that I was not going to be able to deny any other thing.

"Andrew I have fixed up your room with the wildest pictures and the neighbours are just dying to meet the great Andrew Wilkes in the flesh. My neighbour is the president of the 4h club," then a little shyly Miss Pete rushed on saying, "maybe after you have seen her and spoken to her, you will represent her daughter in the lawsuit she is bring against her husband. Her daughter's father was recently appointed president of one of the biggest banks here and you know just how these children can be when their parents have the money," she said sourly. Apparently amused Andrew said, "It seems to me that you do not like them, Aunt Pete." She shook her head vigorously saying "no." "Well then why do you want me to represent this rich, spoilt girl Aunt Pete?" with a mischievous smile playing at the corners of his mouth he questioned, "tell me something are you in their 4-h club?" Hesitantly she answered, "well n-o, but I do not see what this has got to do with

whether you are going to take the case or not Andrew." With her face going scarlet she said, furiously "Andrew. How dare you suggest such a thing?" "Well are you in it Aunt Pete?" She shook her head saying, "you can be assured that if I want to be in that club, I can easily be a member. Just you remember that I still have some of my influence here in the village, Andrew."

"Now bid farewell to Stephen because we are going now, and the meal which I have so carefully prepared must be getting cold." I looked across at Andrew, expecting him to laugh at her foolish suggestion. But instead he turned to me and said, "well I guess that this is goodbye for now Uncle Stephen, because I have had quite a long and weary journey on the train, but I promise that I would come and visit as soon as my tired bones will permit it." He then turned away from me and I knew that he was also turning away from my life. I shrugged my shoulders — Well I tried didn't I? I was now supposed to start all over again, to pick up the pieces. Now, where did I get off? When was it that I had let Andrew come into my life? I shrugged my shoulders again, everything was going to work out just fine. Where were the threads of my life, just where did I lay them down? I searched my mind but I could not find out just where I was supposed to start from. Did Andrew take them from me when he entered into my life? Well then I could not start over again if he was the beginning and the end of my life. "Andrew don't!" I shouted after him, "do not walk out of my life like this, you know that I have made you my life, please do not take it away from me." I saw the uncomfortable look on Andrew's face but I did not care at that time. "From now on I will not care about anything as long as it does not deprive me of Andrew's love," I promised myself.

Miss Pete looked pleased and I knew that I had let on to her that I was terribly afraid to go it alone without Andrew. "Stephen I had told you once that you will have to come back to me on bended knees but now I am saving you the humiliation by asking you to follow us." "Surely Andrew, you know that she does not really want you to be with her but is just doing this to get back at me," I said angrily. I saw this Miss Pete was looking at me with mocking eyes so I said, "Andrew please believe me when I say that she really does not want you."

"Who took him in when his parents had died in the fire and who paid his law fees?" Miss Pete questioned sarcastically I saw that Andrew had turned beet red at her first question then white with pain at her last. At that moment I thought that Andrew was going to see her as the monster she was but he did not. He shook his head then said tapping me on the shoulder "Uncle Stephen as I promised, I am going to come and have a long chat with you as soon as I am properly rested, Maybe Aunt Pete will come and talk over old times with us." Both Miss Pete and I exchanged shocked and hateful glances.

How dare he suggest such a thing, wasn't it just yesterday that the city folks came into Charlieville and took away our village? And wasn't it just yesterday that Miss Pete had left us to go over to the city folks? To us it was just yesterday and it will always seem that way, but to Andrew and others it was gone and forgotten so many years ago.

Andrew came up to me and shook my hand saying at the same time, "Stop this stupid quarrel with Aunt Pete, Uncle Stephen, it will do the both of you no good, bye now." "Goodbye Stephen until we meet again, as we surely must do," came Miss Pete's voice. So Andrew thought that the quarrel between Miss Pete and I was trash. Was the quarrel between the old peasants and the old city folks trash also?

I watched the handsome monster with the turtle necked sweater and dark sunglasses as he walked away with Miss Pete. Was this Andrew's way of getting rid of me? Soon I dismissed that thought because deep down I knew that he was sincere. Then I shook my head sadly because I knew that things were not going to be as they once so sweetly were. The things that I once so clearly visualised could not be foreseen. But they had to come through — After all were they not the things that I waited on through Andrew?

"Yes with Andrew and myself it was not the same anymore. How I loved that young man but could not tell him. So I just let the love I had for him grow inside of me until it started to choke me. No, I just could not tell him about the love that I harboured for him because I did not seem to be his Uncle Stephen anymore. I know that I had agreed for Andrew to leave and go on to law school because then I saw so many things I was going to make him do to the city folks and also things that he had to do for our village, but now I wonder whether it was right for me to agree on his leaving.

When I saw him getting off the train's step and I turned away, it was because I could not do as the other people were doing, I could not hold on to him and hug him joyously. Then Miss Pete had queried to who paid his law fees, and she was certainly rubbing it in. I can remember the day that Miss Pete brought Andrew into her house. He had stood there in front of the gate, a small child tormented with grief for the loss of his parents. They were the only ones he had and now they were departed from the earth on which men trample, waking the departed ones from their everlasting slumber. Then, if he had the same strange belief as Mary and her people, he will believe that they were enjoying happiness in the faraway kingdom. Happiness that no one would ever find on this earth.

For the few moments that he stood there, I am sure that he must have been watching and wondering just what his future would hold, that is if he had any at all. Then when Miss Pete prodded him with the seemingly empty suitcase he began to walk into the 'house of destruction'.

And as he passed by me, he managed a smile and in that smile he told me lots of things, things like he wanted me to be his friend as he was going to be on his own without anybody to guide him along, and that if I should only stretch forth my hand to meet his already extended one, maybe he would want to live and go on with his plans, plans I did not know about. But most of all he wanted me to give to him love and more than I was capable of giving. Yes, in those few years before there was any separation between us, I really did give to him all my love. That love which I had stored up in me, was the love that I had for mama and papa, but was unable to give to them because I was not sure whether they would have taken it or not. Then there was nothing left for me to do but to shower all that love on Andrew, my beloved.

I had been waiting on Andrew all those years to come back to Charlieville to make me happy. Not by his fulfilling my foolish dreams which I realised now as being quite impossible, but by letting it be just the two of us together as we had planned. We were supposed to shut ourselves away from the evil world. But to me even that seemed impossible. Nothing that I thought of or wanted seemed possible anymore.

With Andrew and myself it was not the same anymore. We tried to make it as it once used to be, but nothing worked. He was no longer

the scared little boy who had begged his uncle Stephen to never leave him with the woman whom he was afraid of. How often I wished that I would see a hint of insecurity in his eyes so that I could run to his side, letting him know that I would always be there if ever he should need me. But no instead. Andrew was helping other people with their problems. Often times I will feel all nervy and upset when his secretary would announce crisply that Andrew is busy and if I would please wait in the adjoining room. Then I would feel uncomfortable when he would come out with his neck red from the stiff white collar. To me there would always be annoyance in his voice as he would say in his business-like tone, "I was busy Uncle Stephen, now what do you want?" Then we would sit there in uncomfortable silence with maybe a few words adding in here and there. Soon I would get up and go because he was always busy. Oh why did I allow him to go into the big ugly city and become like one of them. Oh where was my Andrew, just what had become of him?

It was three months after Andrew's second arrival that Miss Pete came to warn me: "Stephen if you do not come back to me, if you throw down my Empire which I have carefully built in this village, if you throw it down around me, I will make you pay. I am the leader of this miserable village and if you do humiliate me, I am going to make you sorry, I am sure that, I will!" "Miss Pete as you and I both know the war is over, it was over as soon as Andrew stepped down from that train. But I have waited on him all these years, so I've just got to have him. I have lived my life for him Miss Pete, so please do not take him away from me, because then I will have no need to live, and as funny as it may seem to you, I do not want to give up just yet," I said to her.

"Both the peasants and the city folks would laugh at me Stephen, and I will not see to that! I was trying to show the peasants that I did not need them and did not like their way of life, but now, everything seems so stupid, yet I cannot give up. Stephen, although they and I are old, I still have to show them! The nanny and I, we want you on our sides for different reasons, and I must win her and you will help me, wouldn't you Stephen?" I knew then that I was not wrong, I knew all along that Miss Pete and the nanny were up to something which I

am sure was quite sinister and I was the central figure. I felt somewhat happy then, because I was right. Could there be a possibility that Miss Pete and the whole village was wrong in their thoughts about me? Could it be that I am not a luna Oh Hell!

The tears were flowing from between her half closed eyelids but that time I did not feel sorry for her, I did not hold her bony fingers between my strong tough ones, nor did I tell her the answer with my eyes. Yes I was through with feeling sorry for her, since my sympathy for her was destruction for me and had been for my papa too. I said, "Miss Pete you know that I would not come, there is no longer any need for us to fight each other." Stephen please, she begged, "the city folks are my friends do not let me lose my friends" — "You belong with the nanny and the other peasants you need each other because now you can comfort each other it will do you all no good by fighting." And I was indeed surprised with myself for saying that little piece.

It was now time for me to turn my back on Miss Pete although it was too late to do any good since it had destroyed the close relationship between papa and I. Although we were already drifting apart. after mama's death, maybe I could have done something to knit us back together. But then Miss Pete had come along with her promise of helping me medically and thus she was going to take away the stigma of my being a lunatic which she had placed on me. I went to her willingly because it had mattered much to me that I should once again be declared a normal man. By going to her, I went away from papa never to return again — not ever! poor papa!

The morning was cold and gloomy after a night of fearful storms, I had lain there on my bed and pulled the covers over my ears trying to block out the sound of the rain drumming against the board window. The candles were blown out and I heard the sounds of the winds as they whistled moanfully through the cane bushes. Many times I thought, "well this is it." As the rain would sometimes come gushing through the cracks and crevices. But it never was and the little house which papa had built for us never went down because it was strong like papa used to be. Then sleep came until morning and I slept peacefully, because I knew that no harm would come to me as long as I was in the house which papa had built for us.

The winds seemed to blow very cold and hair raising as if they were carrying messages and warnings of certain tragedies. The sun was out, but still it failed to warm out little house and that was very strange since our house always seemed to be given a certain light from the candle which stood on the parson's window, though he was long gone, driven out by the city folks.

A little black dog was scratching and whimpering at the back door. I opened the door and got it inside. Then after bandaging the ugly gash on its right ear, I fed it. Yet it failed to cease its whimpering in that sad moanful way and this seemed to heighten my fears of certain tragedies.

The village was unusually quiet — I did not like it. "Soon Andrew will come by and his quick quiet laughter would take the gloom from over the village," I told myself. But Andrew did not come. The nanny and the man who owned the general store came to tell me that Andrew will never come by again. That I was never going to hear this voice again. Sonny, Andrew is dead — Miss Pete killed him." She finally did just what she had set out to do. "I am sorry Sonny, but this true. She killed him to get back at you." "Why are you telling me all these lies, why are you doing this to me? Tell me that he is on his way up — tell me, tell me that he is!" I shouted hysterically at her.

But all she did was wipe the corner of her eyes with her large green faded kerchief, and shake her head sadly. Then she said with definite finality, "Sonny, Andrew is dead!" Yes, Andrew was dead and I knew that I should also be dead, but I did not even feel anything. Why must my heart be beating when Andrew's own was quite? "This must not be! it must not be!" I shouted as I rocked my body to and fro. Once again I did not take Miss Pete's threat seriously and I paid. I paid dearly by letting her take Andrew away from me.

The dog was rubbing its cold nose on my legs but I did not feel because I was numb. "I must pretend, I have to pretend that Andrew is still alive no matter what they say or do," I told myself. For all those years I have made Andrew my reason for prolonging my useless life. Now though he is dead and I still lived on, I felt no loss or grief and I knew that the way I was feeling was not right.

After the nanny had said her last goodbye, I sat down to think about what I must do without Andrew. Then after much pondering, I decided to live a make-belief life by pretending that he was still there.

I went through Andrew's funeral like a zombie. I watched his body for the last time before it was lowered into the grave. Yes, he was indeed a stranger. Funnyily, even long after his return, I could not recognise him. There was no more love in my heart for him, though I had been seeing him so very regularly. Yet, I said, "my beloved you are only asleep, soon you would be awake and everything will be the same as it was before you left Charlieville, wouldn't it be Andrew? Soon too, I will tell you just how much I disapprove of your long hair and you will get annoyed as you always do."

"Sonny, please do not punish yourself in this way, remember that Andrew is dead-gone from this world forever. What are you going to do now," the nanny asked as she lifted me gently from the grave's side. There was nothing that I wanted to do more than sit at the grave's side and keep watch over Andrew's body until he should awaken. "You could not have stopped her because it was already too late when you discovered just what she was doing to you. I wish now that you had heard me when I was calling out to you — we could have defeated her," she said with an angry edge to her voice. "Oh how I wanted to destroy her!" she cried out with a vengeance that it frightened me.

"Get down from this hill sonny, because now you have got to learn to live without him. There is your papa — he still needs you, he still wants to see you. He often talk about the time when you ran away from the school and never went back," she said laughingly. A cold hand clutched at my already heavy heart. "Then papa remembers everything, he remembers all the hurtful and disgraceful things that I did to mama and him. Even all the heartaches that I brought to them," I said aloud. "Maybe he does but I am sure that it does not hurt a bit. All that he wishes is for you to come and see him. Go to him because I know that it will help the both of you a great deal," she said anxiously. "No, I will not go to him. Andrew is dead to the world, for me he will always live on — I cannot leave him. Papa means nothing to me now, and did not for a very long time. It has been quite a long time, to long since I have regarded him as 'papa'," I told her.

"Miss Pete is free sonny, she is no where to be found. Maybe she will come up here to kill you to sonny." "Miss Pete knows that I am already dead because she killed me when she killed Andrew. I must stay on this hill as long as he is asleep because soon, he will need me," I told her.

"Sonny, please listen to me," the nanny said frightened. Even she too, was afraid of Miss Pete. There was no more fright left in her — she was once a great leader, but now, nothing!

I looked at the head — stones around me. One was mama's and the other, Andrew's. I stood in the middle of both, and once again I was wondering why there was always sadness in our village. I wondered then as before, that if I had taken my parents away with me to the city, if there were going to be any tragedy. But it was too late for regrets.

In the shacks on the hills, negro spirituals were being sung as usual, but I did not join in the singing as I always did. They were smuggled together — they were a family. Like Miss Pete, I did not want to belong with the rest of the peasants, so now I am alone. I looked out at the village and heard wild city music playing. The moonlight lighted up our village and the people were happy because they had one another. I groped at the head — stone of Andrew's grave for reassurance that I was not alone. And I was sobbing deeply when I heard the frenzied shouts of the villagers. I raised my head from the soft sweet smelling earth to see what the confusion was all about. It was then that I saw that the hospital in which papa was, was enveloped in flames. "Papa's life must be in danger," I told myself. I was thinking that I should not leave Andrew alone, when I heard his voice saying, "Go to your papa Uncle Stephen, I know that very soon you will come back to me. Now go on and see what this is all about." And I left.

I ran down to the centre of the village, but arrived late. The fire was already diminishing and the last of the mad, screaming people were being led out of the smouldering building. Miss Pete came out too, a small disheveled figure. She looked then as the tall thin witch, which was rumoured that she had become. Her hair was matty and grey — even greyer than the nanny's who was a great deal older, and her feet were unsteady in her high heeled pumps. She ran through the crowd, searching, seeking me. When her small beady eyes had sought me out, she came over to me and said, "I warned you Stephen, didn't I tell you that I will make you come back to me and that if you don't do as I wish, I will make you pay? I didn't want to do it Stephen, but you made me, so you would have to come back to me. Are you coming

now Stephen? You do not know how much I suffered and was humiliated because of you. Many times I wanted to come and beg at your feet but my pride never allowed me to do so. Then too, it was the same thing over again, I had to show the nanny that I could get anything without any blockades. Why did you hesitate Stephen, and why are you hesitating even now?"

I just stood there looking at the woman who was all my unhappiness. And in her eyes I saw all my unhappiness unfolding before me: The time when I ran away from the school house was the first, then mama's death, papa being locked up and again, Andrew's death . . . Yes, Miss Pete brought all those things upon me. Even our unhappy village, she helped to bring it that way.

"Why are you hesitating now, Stephen, when it is already too late? There is no Andrew because I have killed him. Yes, Stephen when there is no more your papa because I have killed him also — I have roasted him." I did not make any attempt to strike out at her because I knew that it would not help. Surely it could not have compensated for the way in which she destroyed me and the people whom I loved. And besides I was puking so violently that I was unable to move.

Then too, I was wishing that all this, my whole life was just a frightful nightmare and that when I awoke, I would once more be back in my pullovers and find myself at school. But then I knew it was too real, too wicked, to be a nightmare.

"The people who were there, were quiet as though attending a grave side sermon, except when the little gasps of, "OH NO" and, "How those people must have suffered!" escaped their lips, as Miss Pete began to reveal her vile deeds.

She turned to the crowd and shouted to them, "He should have been my husband!" that was said of the charred body, now being placed in the ambulance. "But she tricked him and he never did believe me when I told him. She was no good because she came in from the outside. She came in from the outside, yet she felt that she was too good to mix with the women — folk of Charlieville, we with our simple ways and prudish behaviour. I warned him but he did not listen to me because she had already wounded him around her little finger. The

nanny knew about it also, but she did not help me, even though I begged her to do so. Even though I begged her to help me get back my happiness and life. She refused to help me because she was deeply involved. Now you see why all these years I have been trying to show everybody else that I could get anything I desire without any blockades. Oh why did this woman have to come into this village why did she change me, why did she destroy me like this?" Did Miss Pete say that mama destroyed her? Funny how I never looked at it any other way, except by Miss Pete destroying people.

Talking about the charred man who was once my very strong papa, she said, "He should have been my husband but he was bewitched by that dirty woman, but now he has paid dearly — yes I have punished him." Again to the crowd she said, "she gave him a son who is not his. Yes! Stephen is not his son and the nanny knew it but in order to protect her son, she said nothing and in so doing robbed me of my happiness. I stopped living at twenty, because on that day, they were married." Then to me she turned and said, "The retired mayor is your father and the nanny your grandmother because he is her child." I stood there doing nothing. I felt strange, no grief, no happiness, just plain strange. Suddenly Miss Pete broke down and cried. I guess that everyone who was there felt sorry for her as they saw the tears rolling down her cheeks. Yet, no sounds came from between her sealed lips.

Soon everything was over. The people were heading back to their respective homes to talk over the sensational news, which they had just heard, straight from the mouth of the speaker, a woman whom they will be saying was full of hate and grief because she was robbed of the person who once meant and still means everything to her, although she had destroyed him. They will pity her for all the heartaches she bore through her lifetime. They will consider this the end of her life, because though she still breathed, she had turned stark, raving mad.

I turned and watched the woman who was no more gently being led away, with tears streaming down her cheeks and a little smile playing at the corners of her mouth. Yes, I watched her walking away then suddenly she turned around and looked at me with that smile plastered on her face. Suddenly her dress seemed to swallow her, and

her silver grey hair seemed even greyer and matter. She looked so helpless and defenceless. She went through a lot to get back at the person who had destroyed her life and who had hurt her the most, that person was papa. At that moment, pity overcame me and I shouted out to her. "Miss Pete! Miss Pete! please wait on me, I am going to help you Please — wait — on — me". But she just stared blankly at me, with that smile still plastered on her face, and the tears streaming down her cheeks. She heard me as she did all the voices around her, she saw as she did all the other faces around her but could not recognize.

The two doctors gently turned her around and began leading her to the ambulance, which will in turn take her to a kind of world and to a kind of life she will never recognize, which will just keep on existing until one day her weary soul and body shall be put to rest. "Miss Pete! Miss Pete!" I called after her, but she did not turn around.

I watched the woman as she walked away as if in a trance. She pityingly indeed was a woman who is no more. The nanny came over to me and rested her hands on my shoulder I shrugged them roughly away. I knew that she did not deserve to be treated the way I was treating her, at least nobody deserved to be treated the way I did them, but it was too late to do anything about it. "It is true sonny, everything that she said is true. I was waiting on your mama to tell it to you Sonny, but she never did. Then when she died, things happened so quickly, that I thought maybe I should not let you know. Now I wish that I had the courage to let you know sooner Sonny," the nanny said wringing her hands nervously.

I had to hurry to Andrew, because I had something important to tell him. "Uncle Stephen, stay here in the village where you belong — do not run away because there will never be happiness anywhere else for you," I heard Andrew's voice call out, when I told him that I was leaving the village in which I was born, the village in which my papa was born and his papa also, and the whole long line of Gillineaus. The Gillineaus were my papa's people who once started out to build Charlieville with the help of the Toussaints who were the nanny's people. They worked side by side to build a better Charlieville. Their idea of a better Charlieville was one full of produce for the market.

From the sixteen families who had started out by building Charlieville, no one ever ran away or brought disgrace to his family

whether present or past. But once again I was bringing disgrace to papa and the other dead Gillineaus.

"Please do not worry about me Andrew, you are going to sleep, you will sleep forever and will not need me." "Uncle Stephen, please do not do this to yourself," Andrew pleaded with me. "Andrew, you will not understand that I must, but I will have to go away." "But Uncle Stephen . . ." "Hush Andrew," I interrupted him, "Now go to sleep, h-u-s-h! you will sleep forever." With that I stole down the hill because I knew that Andrew was asleep and that he was going to be asleep for always. Not that I had any need to steal down the hill because there was nothing or no one around to disturb him, since Miss Pete was out of the way.

The morning I left Charlieville, I got up early and opened one of the board windows. The sun was still behind the mountains and the village felt lonely. I felt lonely too, but my mind was already made up. I missed hearing the cursing blatant voices of the men on the construction site, at the foot hills. Only the sounds of the big engined lorries and trucks made me aware that other people were up also.

I knew that soon, and maybe even to soon, the expected was going to happen and it did. I stopped musing by the window and got up. I then stepped down carefully from the old rickety steps and went out into the yard. For the last time, I took a good look around the wet yard and then walked over to the fowl coop with some corn in my hand.

The black hen cackled knowingly, as it pecked away the scattered corn on the floor of the fowl coop. I watched it as it ate and decided that I should set it free, but it cowered back into the corner, because it did not wish to be set free. However I left the door opened and made my way down the hill.

The nanny saw me first and ran down the hill to meet me: "Sonny we are waiting on you to start your papa's funeral-please hurry", she said anxiously. "I am not coming! now to me after living with him all these years, he seems to be a stranger. How could you do that to such a good man? O, how I would like to take back some of the heartaches and pain, I gave him. Imagine all the time that he was hating himself for bringing a lunatic into the world, when it wasn't like that. No! I

won't come to witness his funeral nor to look at the grave I have prepared for him. He never was my papa, and all through his lifetime he never knew, or did he?" I asked her rudely. She shook her head violently from side to side and at the same time said between her swollen lips, "No Sonny, he never knew thank God that he never knew." "Thank God?" I asked incredulously. "I pity the poor old man for being made to believe that me the lunatic is his son. I made him suffer God, how I made him suffer! I am not a Gillineau, he was the last of the Gillineaus and I killed him. Oh yes, I killed a Gillineau. I am nothing but a weak coward Toussiant - all Toussiants are weak and coward." I spat out at the sobbing nanny.

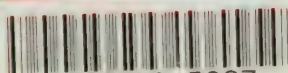
I watched the man who owned the General Store as he ran down the hill to meet the nanny. Then he took hold of her shoulders and gently led her back up the hill. Suddenly the nanny broke loose of the tight hold he had on her shoulders and came down once again to meet me. Breathlessly she said, "Once again I am begging you to take heed of what you are doing. Andrew is dead but you are alive. You can still go on living because he did not mean much to you as before he went away to the city. If he was alive, may be you were going to be really heart broken, because I am sure that he was going to build a new life for himself, with a family. Everybody has got to build their own life especially successful business-like people as Andrew. Now please listen to me Sonny." Seeing the determined look on my face, the nanny said tearfully. "Once I had said that I will fight you to the bitter end and win Sonny, but now it seems to me that this was not to be, because you have won again Sonny. "Cheers" for you and Miss Pete, 'Cheers'," she said again.

With that she turned and fled up the hill, with her skirt whipping at her skinny body. Mary, the man who owned the General store and the retired mayor, all ran forward to meet her. There they all stood. Four people who were involved in my unhappy life in Charlieville. Four people who offered me their hand and I knew them not, and I still did not know the name of the nanny, the man who owned the General store and the retired mayor. "Who are you people, what did you want from me?" I shouted up to them.

I saw the city folks talking in tight little knots—they were afraid to move away because they will fall. They were talking and laughing but they were unhappy, they were trying to drown out their unhappiness, since nobody is happy.

The nanny turned around and led the people to the spot where papa was to be buried. The people followed her with their heads hung low. Well, for once she was the leader of the village again. Leading the procession to the funeral of one of the greatest men of Charlieville. But the nanny was still wiping away at her eyes with her large green faded handkerchief. Then, I in turn, took one last look up the hill — at the people I hated most, the city folks.

“Stephen on those days when there was rain, to me the sun would come out and take the darkness from over our village,” papa’s voice came back to me. The village was still dark, but over the little house which papa had built for us, there was no darkness — no, there will never be any darkness. “Rover! Rover!” I heard a little boy call out as he ran down the hill to fetch the dog. The little dog stopped and rushed to its owner, so I was completely alone.



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